

THE
HISTORICAL GAME-CHANGES
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF
DEVOTION AND CASTE
AS USED AND MISUSED
BY
THE
BHAGAVAD-GITA

BY

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**THREE EPIGRAPHS
ON THE ATHLETE OF THE SPIRIT**

Majority of us are born, eddy around, die only to glut the grave. Some begin the quest, eddy around, but at the first difficulty, getting frightened, regress to the non-quest inertia. A few set out, but a very small number make it to the mountain top.

Mathew Arnold, *Rugby Chapel*

Among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection, and even among these who strive and succeed, scarcely one knows Me in truth.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* 7. 3

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one.

St. Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthian Church*, 9.24-25

Acknowledging my goodly heritage

Father, Savarimuthu's world-class expertise in Theology: Christian, Lutheran and Hindu

Mother, Annapooranam, who exemplified Christian *bhakti* and nurtured me in it

Aunt, Kamalam, who founded Tamil grammar and literature in me in my pre-teen years

Daughter, Rachel, who has always been supportive of my education

Grandchildren, Charisa and Chara, who love and admire me

All my teachers all my years

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Abstract

This thesis considers that the purport of the *Bhagavadgita* is to prioritize the philosophy of loving devotion to God (*bhakti*), not the propagation of color-coded-caste (*varna system*). The distinction between *bhakti* and caste becomes clear when one sees their effect on human life and on the society. *Jnana* and *karma*, two of the other polarities with which the *Gita* contends, finally support *bhakti* towards betterment, not deterioration, if done selflessly and with balance. Caste, however, is a totally different tension, which is always detrimental to the well-being of the person and the society.

In the *Gita*, the devotees' mystical or emotional love of God apprehends their oneness with the Supreme God and with all beings, and transcends the pitiless segregation of the caste system, and opens the path of salvation to all irrespective of race, color, caste, class or gender in life. In spite of much opposition from orthodoxy, the *bhakti* movement spread all over India, and *bhakti* itself rose to the level of orthodoxy and has become the faith of millions of people especially of the south, and surprisingly, of even of those of the so called highest caste.

And yet, caste still remains as an indelible mark of every Hindu, even after they change their religion. Although caste is less venomous now, it is still openly present in all walks of Indian life and shows up its ugly head at important moments such as marriage, elections for public office, admission to school or employment.

True, *bhakti* is the antidote for caste; but only real *bhakti* can remove caste completely, not mere lip-service to it. This thesis claims that *bhakti* is the deliberate major thrust of the teaching of the *Gita* while caste seems to be a contradiction of this thrust.

Preface

This paper examines *bhakti* and *varna* (caste) system that the *Bhagavad-Gita* disseminates, as both have caused monumental Game-Changes in the socio-religious settings of the Indian society as a whole from ancient times. As in a game of chess, here in the *Gita* too, the locus of power changes with every move of each player. The *Gita*'s technique is a progressive display of changes in the metaphysical and historical playing field of India, in which exclusive *jnana* and egalitarian *bhakti* have a power-play for priority, in which *bhakti* establishes its genuine superiority gradually while repressive *varna* seems to contradict the validity of the moral philosophy of the *Gita*.

The paper discusses this issue conscious of my own historical approach of search for the truth in the *Gita*, and sensitive of the approach of the faith of the practicing modern Hindu reader according to their personal realization, religious denomination or dogma.

The *Gita*, as a literary phenomenon, has a meaning and a purpose in its own right. As interpreters of the *Gita* challenge each other's claims to opposite extremes,¹ this thesis re-examines the topic of *bhakti* directly from the text of the *Bhagavad-Gita* itself as a document of its time, before considering what a later commentator, such as Sankara or Ramanuja, teaches about the *Gita* or how a later Advaitin or a neutral historian interprets Sankara or Ramanuja.

¹ Arvind Sharma, The Role of the 'Anugita' in the understanding of the *Bhagavadgita*, in *Religious Studies* 14, no. 2 (June, 1978): 261-267. The *Anugita* or "The Recapitulation of the *Gita*" is a part of the Epic *Mahabharata*. Sharma notes that all the devotional elements of the *Gita* are missing in the *Anugita* because of its decidedly "Gnostic" character. As such, he concludes that the *Anugita*'s importance for the interpretation of the *Gita* seems questionable as it does not take seriously the differences that are central in the *Gita*'s teaching. Thus the "Anugita," one of the first interpretations of the *Gita* available to us, is devoid of all the devotional elements, which are central to the *Gita*.

R. C. Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 7. Zaehner too confirms that the *Anugita* omits all the teaching in the *Gita* of Krishna as being "most mysterious"—the revelation of the love of God. Krishna is not the teacher in the didactic chapters (12, 13 and much of 3 and 5) of the *Mahabharata*.

While the body of the thesis is essentially historical-critical in nature, that is, strictly philosophical, one claim goes beyond this measure and that is basically my own personal assessment (not at all speculative), namely, that the *Gita* was redacted over time and that the contradictions in the *Gita* between *bhakti* and *varna* is a consequence of these redactions (my claim). Some references regarding redactions are given in the footnotes ²

This paper has five chapters.

Chapter 1 gives the historical aspect of the *Gita*, with a table of chronology followed by the etymology of the Sanskrit word “*bhakti*,” and its English, Tamil and Greek equivalents, and discusses the origin of *bhakti* in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata*, and the Tamil *bhakti* movement.

Chapter 2, the main body of the thesis, is structured a) to interpret all the verses in the *Gita* containing the word “*bhakti*” or its equivalents, to see if the *Gita* develops an argument through them for theism and *bhakti*, b) a critical assessment on Chapter eleven of the *Gita*, considered to be the climax of the *Gita*, as it proclaims the ‘New Revelation of God,’ c) an analysis of the *Gita*’s four ways to God, *karma*, *jnana*, supreme *bhakti*, and supreme *bhakti* with surrender d) an examination of the aspects of love between the *bhakta* and God, and e) a comparison of the goals, liberation and salvation.

Chapter 3 investigates two ancient Indian interpreters who revolutionized the concepts of Hinduism: Sankaracharya and Ramanujacharya; and two modern interpreters who interpreted it innovatively: Sri Lokamanya Bal-Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.

² Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963) 14 ...the text may have received many alterations in subsequent times.

H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 380-81).

A. J. Appasamy, *Bhagavadgita in Gitasamiksha*, Ed. E. R. Sreekrishnasarma (Tiruppati: Sri Venkateswara University Press, 1971), 121.

A. L. Basham, *Wonder that was India* (London: Picador, 2004), p 409-11.

D. D. Kosambi, *Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavadgita* , *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 4. No. 2 (Aug., 1961), pp. 204-5.

Chapter 4 examines the critiques of four modern interpreters of the *Gita* on *bhakti* in the *Gita*: two bishops, Appasamy and Neill, and two Professors, Zaehner and Zimmer

Chapter 5: This chapter argues that, in the *Gita*, how the upper-most caste uses the theory of the three *gunas* (innate attributes) to suppress the three castes below it, and exploit the casteless ethnic tribes and peoples of India, which is very much against the grains of the religion of *bhakti*, which the *Gita* itself advocates.

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Abbreviations

CB: Chit-Bhavananda

R: Ramanuja

Rk: Radhakrishnan

S: Sankara,

Z: Zaehner

n: notes

The *Upanishads* are denoted by their initial letters in the upper case,
their Chapters and sections in Roman numerals,
their Verses in Arabic numerals.

Introduction to the subject, “*bhakti*”

Bhakti is the warp and the woof of popular Hinduism in India today for it underlies and inspires popular worship.³ Vaishnavism is close to *bhakti*, but Saivism is closer being imbued through and through with *bhakti* in every aspect of it. Albeit, the subject of *bhakti* has not yet received the attention of scholars it deserves. Besides, “Hinduism” is a non-Hindu label.

Considering the fact that we meet the best of Hinduism in its classical expression of *bhakti*, both in Sanskrit and Tamil, Dhavamony complains that even outstanding western Indologists and also Indian scholars have failed to study it with care.⁴ They have either left it aside or treated it scantily. Even those who write about *bhakti* deal only with the Gita or Vaishnavite *bhakti*. Perhaps, they feared that Siva-*bhakti* would be too terrible with its association of the fearful god, ‘Rudra’-Siva (wrathful-Siva) of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* even though the meaning of the word ‘Siva’ is ‘love’ (*anbu*) and the Hindus understand this aspect of Siva.

The reason for this neglect of *bhakti* in India is attributed mainly to the rise of “Vedantism,” which champions the cause of the *Advaita* in order to suit the purpose of being a universal religion of sorts syncretising in itself all other religions. Neo-Vedantism accorded *bhakti* a lower status as something anthropomorphic and emotional, as pertaining to the *maya*-ridden world of duality and distinction. The advaitic experience of oneness with all beings was extolled above everything else. Though *bhakti* is

³ Father Mariasoosai Dhavamony, *Love of God according to Saivasiddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1. This book is dedicated to R. C. Zaehner who took a keen interest in this doctoral research work of Davamony’s, which is a very first attempt of this kind by any one to probe into the theology of Tamil Saivism and its *bhakti* mysticism. This work is acknowledged by scholars as a classical reference text in this subject.

⁴ There is a new flow of *bhakti* literature since Dhavamony’s statement, but more is needed on this subject.

considered a cherished possession of the Hindu religion, it was explained as an emotional and imperfect form of it, something quite opposed to the classical tradition of Hinduism.⁵

It may be pointed out that since *Brahmanism* does not teach the doctrine of *bhakti*, the European and American Sanskritists and Vedic scholars who translated the Vedas and philosophical *Brahmanical* texts have almost paid no attention to the *bhakti* literature. Due to this neglect of *bhakti*, many westerners hold the one-sided view that Hinduism regards the world as an illusion, its central idea is non-dualism, and the innermost essence of man (*atman* or self) is identified with the changeless ultimate ground of all existence (Atman or the Self). These scholars did not see the existence of the theistic current of Hinduism which supplied the intellectual framework for the *bhakti* religions, but thought rather that *bhakti* was of little consequence in the history of Indian religions. Thus *bhakti* was suppressed deliberately by *Brahmanism*, and knowingly or unknowingly by its western interpreters. Even the modern west generally follows the tradition of its predecessors, limiting its microscopic vision to Sanskrit, Brahmanism and northern India. This paper wishes to take them further afield.

Zaehner makes the statement, in line with Dhavamony, in the introduction to his own work, "*The Bhagavad-Gita*," by saying that, among mystics, there are two types: those who see love to be the central phenomenon in a mystical experience, and those who disregard love altogether.⁶ The latter would only express themselves exclusively in terms of unity, the escape or 'liberation' from time, the phenomenal world, and all that conditions it. Very rarely do the two kinds of mysticism meet as they do in the *Gita*. The

⁵ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 3.

⁶ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2-3: Here Zaehner cites his own work *Sacred and Profane* (Clarendon Press, 1957), where he shows these varieties of mysticism.

Gita demonstrates that the mystic experience of the love of a personal God is not merely the means and the goal of spiritual 'liberation' (*moksha or mukti* of the *Upanishads* or the *vimutti* of the Buddhists), but it is the grand experience of the soul of the love of God, without which the mystic relationship is incomplete.

Zaehner, as well as Dhavamony, state that the unique place of love in the relationship between God and the human being is missed by many modern commentators because they were conditioned by Sankara's authoritative Vedantic non-dualistic interpretation of the *Gita*. These commentators have ignored the commentary of the modified non-dualist *Vedanta* of Ramanuja, the commentary of the 'dualist' Madhva,⁷ and the dogmatic texts and the devotional songs of the Saivite saints, which, I think, are so much nearer to the spirit of the *Gita*.

In addition to the above, there is another reason for the neglect of the *bhakti* texts. The one-sided view of Brahmanical Hinduism declared that all vernacular languages of India, other than Sanskrit, were and still are generally underdeveloped (barbaric) and difficult to learn; that the south Indian language of Tamil, for example, in which most of the early important *bhakti* texts of the *Nayanmars* and *Alvars* were written, together with all the regional languages of India belonged to the inferior low-caste people, and therefore they are all inferior compared to the so-called divine noble Aryan language of Sanskrit. Consequently, the Dravidian languages of south India (roughly south of Bombay and Calcutta) and the *bhakti* literature in those languages are still characterized as inferior. The west, generally, did not venture to verify this proposition. Some noteworthy

⁷ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 3.

exceptions to this generalization are Dr. H. W. Schomerus,⁸ who translated the Saivite master-piece Tamil poetry *Tiruvacagam* of Manikkavasagar into German and compared Manikkavasagar to Meister Eckehart; Dr. G. U. Pope (Oxford), who translated the same *Tiruvacagam* (1987) and a few other Tamil texts into English; and Father Constantine Joseph Beschi of Italy⁹ who wrote the “*Thembavani*” in Tamil epic style. Beschi enjoyed writing Tamil prose and poetry in nine other styles of Tamil literature. It is some consolation that Europeans are beginning to find out the truth about the Tamils, their language and culture which include the *bhakti* religion.¹⁰ It should therefore be stressed that words such as ‘*bhakti*,’ ‘grace’ or ‘love’ are absent or rare in the great Sanskrit writings of the Advaitins and in the writings of modern Neo-Advaitins in any language.

The author of the *Gita* may be pictured as presenting his secret teaching to the graduating student Arjuna. It is a common practice for the *guru* (teacher) to whisper a formula containing the essence of his teaching directly and secretly into the ear of each graduating student so that no one else would hear it. Thus the last verses (*carama-sloka*) of the last chapter of the *Gita* reveal the secret essential teaching of Krishna, the ‘*Gita-Rahasya*,’ which is about God’s love and devotion to his devotee: ‘I love you deeply because you are dear to me; you love me, worship me and come to me for shelter from all evils; I will deliver you’ (18. 64-66). The loving personal God’s assertion of his love to

⁸ H. W. Schomerus, *De Hymnen Des Manikkavasaga* (Leipzig: Lutheran Mission Press, 1923). His other book is *Meister Eckehart und Manikkavasagar* (Halle: Gutersloh, 1936).

⁹ Father Constantine Joseph Beschi, “*Thembavani*” (Madurai, India, 1726). Beschi of Venice, Italy, was a Catholic priest who dedicated his life to the service of Christ - for India and Tamil. He wrote *Thembavani* in ‘epic style’ on the early life of Jesus Christ from the point of view of Joseph, the guardian-father of Jesus.

¹⁰ G. Deva-neya Pa-vanar, the doyen of linguistics writes, “So long as the Westerners wander in the wilderness of Sanskrit, they will never find the path, even if they continue to do so for forty ages. If they come out of that labyrinth and search for the truth in Tamil, they will find it.”

the beloved devotees is the most important promise to the *bhaktas* who depend on it for their release from *samsara* (cycles of lives) and for their final salvation.

However, the Advaitins and Neo-Advaitins explain away this *caramasloka* as a metaphysical, impersonal relationship between the macrocosmic Self of the Absolute and the microcosmic embodied self of the individual.¹¹ However, those *Advaitins* who follow Ramanuja's *Visishtadvaita* philosophy believe in both, the impersonal Absolute *Brahman* as well as the personal God, Vishnu-Narayana and His *avatars* such as Krishna. The Dualist Madhva did not concede to *Advaita* at all, but stood his grounds for the personal God and the priority of *bhakti*. Nevertheless, the everyday reality is that most devotees do not care to know if there is One divinity or more, any distinction between personal and impersonal divine beings or the body and the spirit.

Further, in medieval times, as Vedic rituals and sacrifices were disappearing in the north due to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism, Brahmin priests were coming to the south seeking the patronage of the Dravidian Kings. Consequently, Tamil and Sanskrit languages were being mixed together into a pearl-coral (*mani-pravalam*) language. Since the magnificent epic, *Mahabharata*, with the *Gita* inside it, and the second grand epic *Ramayana* had been translated into Tamil before the extant Tamil *bhakti Sastras* of the Dravidians were finally collected, organized and canonized, a good deal of Sanskrit had entered into the Tamil texts. Therefore, the presence of Sanskrit words in these sacred Tamil texts must not imply the origin of their content from Sanskrit: *bhakti* is authentically Dravidian.

¹¹ Zaehner does not explain '*Gita Rahasya*' in the *caramasloka* in his "*Bhagavad-Gita*."

Tamil Saivism is vast and different, based chiefly on its own *Agamas*: the fourteen doctrinal *Sastras* and the twelve devotional *Tirumurais* of the sixty-four Saivite saints.¹² Unlike Arjuna of the Gita, these Saivite saints are historical persons, and their sacred poetry is the outburst of their personal experiences expressed in thousands of verses which touch the hearts of the hearers and readers.

About the same time as the Saivite *Nayanmars*, the Tamil Vaishnavite *Alvars* also sang their beautiful sacred *bhakti* songs, which are enshrined in the “*Nalayira-Divya-Prabhandam*” (Compendium of Four-Thousand-Sacred Lyrics). These men and women *Nayanmars* and *Alvars* made the whole of South India reverberate with their sacred hymns, and are revered irrespective of their castes and classes in life as priests, kings, farmers, hunters, or untouchables.

Bhakti writings display all the three aspects of *bhakti*: i) God, the object of *bhakti*, ii) the devotee, *bhakta*, who loves God, and iii) the experience (*anubhava*) of *bhakti*-relationship between God and the human being. The *Saivite* writings surpass the *Vaishnavite* ones in being completely imbued with these three aspects and dripping with love. The doctrine of *bhakti* and its theistic mysticism finally propose a way for the attainment of spiritual liberation and union with God, which most people desire.^{13,14}

¹² Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 4.

¹³ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 7.

¹⁴ F. S. Janzow Ed. *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 89. The Christian's love-relationship with Christ (God) also has all these three aspects of *bhakti*: God, the human being and the reciprocal relationship between the two, but with the difference, that God first loves unconditionally and the human being returns that love, however meager that may be. The mediator between the two is the Holy Spirit of God who calls, gathers, enlightens, purifies and enables the beloved to yield fruit by God's grace.

HISTORY: CHRONOLOGY

THE VEDIC, UPANISHADIC, BUDDHIST, JAINA and EPIC TIMES

1700 to 900 BCE: The Four Vedas

C. 1700-1500 Nomads in the Punjab region compose the Rig Veda .
 C. 1200-900 The Vedic people compose the Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas.

600 to 100 BCE: The Upanishads, the Buddha and Jaina

c. 600-500	Aranyakas are composed
c. 500	Shrauta sutras are composed
c 500-400	Early Upanishads: Brahadaranyaka, Chandogya, Kaushitaki
c. 500	Pataliputra founded, Vedic people gradually move southwards
c. 483 or 410	Gautama Buddha dies at the age of about 80
c. 468	Vardhamana Jaina dies (the twenty fourth Tirtankara)
c. 400-120	Katha , Kaushitaki, Svetasvatara and Mandukya Upanishads
c. 300-100	Dharma-sutras are composed

300-BCE to 232 CE: From the Twin-Epics and the Gita to Asoka

c. 300 BCE-300 CE	The Mahabharata Epic composed with the Gita in it
c. 200-BCE – 200 CE	The Ramayana Epic was composed
c. 327-325 BCE	Alexander invades North-west South Asia (326-India)
c. 324 BCE	Buddhist king Chandragupta Maurya begins his rule
c. 265-232 BCE	Buddhist Emperor Asoka rules

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¹⁵ The Chronology is derived from Wendy Doniger O'flaherty, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 164, 199, 213. (Hiriyanna, "Outlines of Indian History" (London: George Allen &Unwin Ltd.'1964)13: "The only date that can be claimed to have been settled in the first one thousand years of Indian history, for example, is that of the death of the Buddha in 487 BCE."

Etymology and use of the Sanskrit term '*bhakti*' (Love) ¹⁶

The word *Bhagavad* comes from the same root, *bhaj*, as *bhakti*. In Hinduism, *Bhagavan* is the gracious Lord of the *bhakti* cults. The idea of love is expressed by the root '*bhaj*', and its derivative is *bhakti*. The concept of love can be used for several manifestations of love, 1) possession or enjoyment, 2) preference and choice, 3) esteem and honor, 4) attachment and affection, 5) loyalty and devotion. Similarly *bhaj* also can have multiple meanings: to possess, enjoy, enjoy carnally, embrace; to favor, prefer, choose, and elect; to honor, worship, adore, revere, and esteem; to be attached to; to court; to be devoted to, to be loyal. Love can also be secular or religious.

As secular love, the Sanskrit word *bhaj* can be used for grace or devotedness such as faithfulness between equals, friends, spouses, between master and servant, king and subjects, and understood as love a) between parent and child, b) between sexes, c) between master and servant, and d) to *guru*. As religious love, *bhaj* may be used for grace: a) respect and reverence, b) devotion (*bhakti*) in the worship of God, c) external worship of God, d) love (*bhakti*) of God, e) God's love for human beings.

Synonyms for *bhakti* in the *Gita*

The words, "*priti*", "*sneha*", "*prema*", "*anugraha*", "*anurakti*" or "*ishtam*" are also used in the *Gita* synonymously to express *bhakti* as emotional and passionate desire. The terms, "*dhrti*" (satisfaction), "*priti*" (gratification), "*tarsa*" (desire), *raga* (passion) *sneha* (friendship) and *anuraga* (attachment), and words such as "*nam-namra*" (reverential

¹⁶ I am greatly indebted to Fr. Mariasoosai Dhavamony, S.J., for the analysis of the words and semantics of *bhaj* and *bhakti* in Sanskrit, Tamil, in Hinduism, especially in the *Bhagavad Gita* and comparisons with Christianity in his "*Love of God according to Saivasiddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*," (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), which is the first classic of its kind in the subject of love in the *Saiva-Siddhanta*, which is a South Indian Hindu Text of dogma and doctrine in Saivism.

bow), “*upacara*” (respect), and “*puj*” (showing honor) are combined with *bhakti* to denote interpersonal relationship with God, the ultimate ground of worship in the *Gita*

In the *Gita Bhakti* is not developed to convey the full and deep doctrine of the mysticism of love, which we find in the later Hindu religious traditions of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Our purpose in this paper is well served if it is proved that the term “*bhakti*” implies a personal relationship and has been used in the religious context to signify loving devotion to God and love of God to human beings.¹⁷

Comparison of the Sanskrit word “*bhakti*” and the Tamil word “*anbu*”

Tolkappiyar (C. 500BCE), the oldest Grammarian of Tamil, who may be dated at the same time as Panini, the Sanskrit Grammarian, defines the word, ‘*anbu*’ as the “love or attachment that creates a sense of mental satisfaction or pleasure in one’s wife, parents or relatives, and that cements or binds them together.” The word, “*arul*” is another superb Tamil word equally widely used for God’s ‘gracious love.’

The word “*Anbu*” is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit word “*bhakti*” used for love. Both words have many shades of meaning, and both are used in the classical Hindu texts and in everyday life and writings, similar to the usage of the English word “love.” The religious terms are very rich and complex; they have been influenced by the different currents of religious thought, meaning, and new force. Both *bhakti* and *anbu* have been accepted into the thoughts of Christianity and Islam too, with added flavor.¹⁸

The Tamil *Bhakti* doctrine of Saivism has four *margas* (paths) between God and persons (*sanmarga*), between friends (*sahamarga*), between parent and child (*satputra-*

¹⁷ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 20, 77.

¹⁸ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 24-31.

marga), between master and servant (*dasa-marga*), and also relationships between husband and wife (*nayaka-nayaki*), and between teacher and pupil (*guru-sishya*).¹⁹

In the *Gita*, the God of *bhakti* is gracious and compassionate towards all although he is especially benevolent to return the love of those who love him (4.11). *Bhakti* on man's side is the loving response to God, on whom he acknowledges his utter dependence for gaining liberation from the cycle of rebirth. In the *Gita's bhakti* theology, liberation does not appear to be the outcome of *yogic* techniques or ritual practices but of God's grace and man's cooperation with it (10.10). It implies self-surrender of the devotee and God's own gift of himself (10.9). God is the darling of the devotees and the devotees are dear to him (12.13-20): God reveals the highest mystery of His love to the 'perfected devotee' (18.65-66).^{20 21}

¹⁹ C. Singaravelan, *The Theory and Practice of Bhakti in Nayanmars: the four Margas of Reaching God*, in "The Philosophical Heritage of the Tamils," Ed.s. S. V. Subramanian, and R. Vijayalakshmi, (Madurai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1983), 151-165. Each of these four *margas* is practiced in these four ways, *jnana*; *yoga*, *kiriya* and *cariya*, and they lead by the four stages to *moksha*, from *saloka*, *samipa* and *sarupa* to *sayujya*: as servant, child, friend and perfection. However, the non-dual Advaitin leader Dayananda Sarasvati, was opposed to these stages to *moksha*, advocated the 'Back to the Scriptures' way.

²⁰ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 42: In whatever way any one approaches me, in that same way do I participate in (love) them; my path men follow in all ways, O son of Pritha! (4.11).

²¹ To compare this love with the Christian declaration of the mystery of God's love and human love to God one may go to St. Paul. His letter to the Romans (chapters 5-8) contains his song of love: (8.39) and pervades with God's attribute of love, which is the source of our reconciliation and salvation (5: 8).

The Origin and Growth of *Bhakti*

India had its own heritage of religion, philosophies, traditions and writings before the writing of the *Vedas* by the *Aryans*. There is an evolutionary development of *bhakti* from almost nothing in the *Aryan Vedas* and just a few verses in the late *Upanishads* to its much developed form in the *Gita* and a much more advanced level in *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* later on. This evolution was not by chance, but by active intervention by individual visionaries or schools at critical points in the history of Indian philosophy.²²

The *bhakti* movement was not made up of sporadic anecdotal incidents here and there, but was the general awakening of the common people at the time all over India at the same time. However, over the centuries, later Hinduism retains the Upanishadic idealism of the a-cosmic Absolute (*nish-prapanca*), and a well-defined theistic realism of a phenomenal world, cosmic Absolutism (*sa-prapanca*), which is open to all men and women of all castes including all *Brahmin* women and all *Brahmin* defectors too.

²² Hiriyanna, *Outlines*, pp. 89-90; 185: Hiriyanna refers to *Maitri Upanishad* 1v. 3; vi. 9 and *Dates of Philosophical Sutras* by Prof. Jacobi, *Journal of American Oriental Society*, xxxi. 1911. *Manu Sastra* 6. 66 and 10.97 are quoted verbatim in the *Bhagavad-Gita* 3.35 and 18.47.

Agape love described, compared and contrasted with *bhakti* love

In his classical work, *Agape and Eros*, Anders Nygren explains, how although both words, “Agape” and “Eros,” can be translated as “love,” they mean completely different things: Agape is the Christian attitude to life and Eros the Greek idea of love which takes the form of Gnosis. Eros is the soul’s desire to attain to the blessed vision of the super-sensible world in all its beauty; and Gnosis is nothing but the ‘vision of God.’ To illustrate this distinction between Agape and Eros, Nygren chooses the “Agape Hymn” of St’ Paul (1 Corinthians 13),²³ where Paul points out the excellence of Agape and makes it the gold-standard to evaluate all spiritual gifts (13.4). Although superficially alike, Agape and Eros are fundamentally two different ‘loves:’ Eros is ego-centric, Agape is theocentric; Eros puffs up, Agape “is not puffed up” (13. 4); but edifies” (1 Corinthians 8.1).

Further, Nygren claims that it is Paul who first introduces the term “Agape” in the Scriptures for “love”, and hands down the ‘idea of love’ to posterity.²⁴ This is Paul’s passionate polemic to enable the Gentile Christians in Corinth to cultivate charismatic gifts to withstand the religious syncretism prevalent in the contemporary Greek world.²⁵ Agape of the New Testament is, in the first place, God’s own love, not a religious or ethical ideal to which individuals are called to aspire; Agape is manifested in the life of the “Son of Man,” who came to seek and save that which was lost, and above all in his death on the cross; and God’s own Agape is active in the human life transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

²³ A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London, 1932; New York: Macmillan, 194), 1106. Nygren interprets Agape love from the great love song of St. Paul’s we read in the well-known thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Christians at Corinth. Hereafter this will be signified by just the number of the verse in this chapter, 13.

²⁴ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 84.

²⁵ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 99: of Plato, Aristotle, Neo-Platonist and Christian understanding of Eros.

²⁶ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, viii: Agape of God and Agape manifested in human life by divine grace.

Nygren argues that Agape and Eros are essentially antithetic to one another, but they are often confused with each other; they represent two independent ideas that must be distinguished in Christian theology. God is both Creator and Redeemer. Eros is the pagan way of salvation set forth by Plato, Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists while Agape is the Christian way of life. Plato distinguishes the heavenly Eros from the vulgar Eros, which is sensual desire; his Eros is limited to the movement of the human soul towards the satisfaction of its spiritual needs. Aristotle describes the movement of things from Becoming to Being, the process by which the acorn grows into an oak, or a kitten grows into a cat. The sex-instinct provides the raw material for the artistic and the religious temperament; but the heavenly Eros is the sublimation of the sensual Eros.²⁷

The Christian Agape for the neighbor, as shown by Saint Paul, is simply 'God's own Agape nature' active in the human heart by the Holy Spirit. We cannot analyze the psychology of the Holy Spirit, but we can analyze the Spirit's presence and activity. Paul himself analyzes the soul dominated by Agape: When God's Agape is shed abroad in the hearts, through the Holy Spirit, it gains control of the 'human inmost nature,' it overflows and pours itself on others: "love is patient and kind" (13: 4); "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (13.7); "it seeks not its own" because it flows to other human beings (13.5). Whether this love will abide or pass away depends on whether it is born of Divine Agape or human Gnosis-Eros.²⁸

The ideal 'integrated man' of the Gita (6. 17-19), the 'Athlete of the Spirit' (6.27; 7. 3; 8.28) has some similarities with the Christian having Agape, the highest form of

²⁷ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, vii; 121-123. In the rite of Dionysiac orgies, god incarnated as an animal is dismembered and eaten by the Titans; in Orphism Zeus created humankind out of the ashes of Titans. This provides the mystery of the divine and earthy nature and immortality of the soul, transmigration, and salvation by asceticism, purification etc. We see these elements in the Gita and in Hinduism too.

²⁸ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 104.

Christian love, the hallmark of Christianity and the norm of Christian life: norm of action and way of being. Christian theology combines ontology and ethics: What I am, that I do. As such, Agape consists of spontaneity, freedom and moral implication. Agape is the highest form of action which is done without expecting anything in return, unconditional and sacrificial. It is a state of being because the act of love comes spontaneously; Agape has become the person's ontological nature (existence). However, the Gita's 'work,' which is free from desire [of fruit] and motive [even of salvation] (4.19-20); or 'duty' prescribed by the *dharma-sastras* (2.47-51; 18. 7-11) in relation to the *gunas* (3.27; 4.15-18, 33), are not exactly the same as the work of a transformed person with Agape.

The human *bhakti* towards God and the love of God towards the *bhakta* that we see in the Gita are not Agape love of the Bible, where God accepts the individual as he is. In the Gita, on the other hand, God loves the *bhakta*, but not unconditionally: he is first integrated-in-spiritual-exercise first to be Brahman, and draws nigh to Nirvana that is Brahman too (*brahma-nirvana*), to qualify for final liberation (5. 24-26) by reaching Krishna who is the proper object of sacrifice and worship (5. 2, 27- 29). So work is involved in attaining *moksha*. The incarnation of Krishna is to save the *bhakta* and destroy the enemies, unlike the love on the cross which was to forgive enemies. Besides, loving devotion (*bhakti*) is action (*karma*) without seeking rewards (*nish-kama-karma*), sacrifice (*tyaga*), and discipline (*yoga*) necessary for *moksha*.²⁹

The love between God and the human being is expressed so freely in the *Gita* for the first time ever in the history of Hinduism. It is not the same as Agape; however, later *bhakti* religions, Saivism and Vaishnavism are closer to Christianity in this aspect.

²⁹ See below in Chapter 2 for *moksha*: liberation and salvation in the *Gita*.

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *BHAKTI* IN THE *GITA***1.1) THE *VEDAS*: IS THERE *BHAKTI* IN THE *VEDAS*?**

In the *Vedas*, there is theism and ‘participation’ with the gods but, as we shall see, not *bhakti*. The *Vedas* are the sacred *srutis*: *samhitas* (*mantras*) that were orally transmitted from the father to his son or by the teacher to his student to be committed to memory, and passed *on* to the next generation with the same pronunciation, accent, tone and lilt so that the same word and meanings were preserved. They were not written down. Their gods were personifications of the powers of nature (energy) such as the Wind, the Dawn, and the Sun. Of the four *Vedas* of the Hindu religion, the *Rig Veda* is the most important and the most authoritative, not only because it is the oldest, but because it contains the sacred revelation, rituals and chants. As the *Sama-Veda* contains only a selection of chants from the *Rig-Veda*, the *Yajur-Veda* a few formulae for sacrifices, and the *Atharva-Veda* mainly spells and incantations, suffice it to look into the *Rig Veda* alone for *bhakti* (loving devotion).¹

Religion consisted of naturalistic polytheism and sacrificial liturgy in *Vedic* times. The gods attained immortality and varying amounts of power by austerity and by drinking Soma. The Aryans chose one deity to be superior over the others such as Indra, Agni, Varuna or Soma; but none of them, not even Indra, the king of the deities, attained undisputed pre-eminence as Zeus did in Greece or Jupiter in Rome. Next to Indra is Agni, the god of sacrificial fire; fire in every household is honored with a hymn in the very first verse of the *Rig Veda*. The gods exercised power over the lives of people who prayed to them for rain, food, prosperity and victory. The prayers to their preferred deity show their faith (*shraddha*) and their personal relationships with the deity as father, mother, friend

¹ A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (1954; London: Picador, 3rd ed. 2004), 234.

or brother. From the prayers to *Varuna* for forgiveness we learn that he is the omnipotent Emperor, omniscient holy god of natural and moral order (*rta*), who had the most exalted ethics in the whole of the *Rig-Veda* (Rig V. vii, 89; viii.41); he is a major god, or he represents many names. Even within the *Vedic* period *Varuna* soon recedes into the background.

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan. (Rig Veda 1.164. 46)

All these names, says the *Rig-Vedic* poet, are of one and the same Divine Being, the One Supreme Spirit in various manifestations. There was philosophic monotheism and oneness of worshipful divinity; yet monotheism proved abortive.²

As *Varuna* retreats by the end of the *Rig-Vedic* period, a clearly defined Creator God, *Prajapati* appears, whether wholly from the speculations of the *Brahmins*³ or from non-Aryan influences (Rig V. x.90). *Prajapati* is thought of as *purusha*, the primeval man, who 'existed before the foundation of the Universe'⁴; he is also identified with *Brahma*, the male Creator God, in line with the neuter *Brahman*. Basham calls this a significant shift from the older theory that the creation of the world depended on a primeval sacrifice (p. 251: Br.U. i.4).⁵ The shifts from Indra to *Prajapati*, and from the latter to *Brahman*, are huge game-changes.

² Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 236-37.

³ In this paper the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are denoted by their initial letters; the chapters and sections by Roman numerals; the verses by Arabic numerals; the priestly caste of the Aryans is spelled, "*Brahmin*" in order to distinguish it from "*Brahman*" (neuter Absolute) and "*Brahma*" (male Creator God).

⁴ I wonder if 'existed before the foundation of the Universe' means that *Prajapati* existed long before the *Rig Vedic* Aryans landed in India. Besides, *Brahma* is the pre-Aryan Dravidian God of Creation.

⁵ Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 242, 251. The Universe was created when the gods cut the primeval man, *Prajapati*, and made the first cosmic sacrifice of him; and presumably, he survived his own dismemberment. *Prajapati* teaches his student Indra after 101 years that the serene Self that moves about happy in a dream and rises up from the body reaches the highest light and appears in its own form, i.e., in the self-consciousness of the *purusha*, the *Prajapati*: that Self is the immortal, fearless, Supreme Person

Although the *Rig Vedic* worshipper at the sacrifices and prayer sessions is a ‘god-lover’ (*deva-kama* R.V. 8.92.7), ‘god-seeker’ (*devayu*, R.V. 8.92.7) and a ‘friend of the gods’ (*devaya* 7.68.4), this love of gods is not the same as the devotion and love (*bhakti*) of later Hinduism. Secondly, the gods are addressed as siblings born of the same womb, with affection rather than *bhakti* (R.V. 8.72.8). Thirdly, the worshippers’ prayers, *soma* drinks and sacrificial offerings are said to strengthen the gods themselves (R.V. 2.12.15) who are not like the God of the *bhakti* worship, who strengthens the devotee.⁶

In the *Vedic*-Period or in the literature of that period which we possess today, even in the *Vedic* religious context, the term *bhakti* is never used to express ‘worship’ or ‘love’ of God, but merely as ‘participation’ in the sacrificial ritual (10.15.3);⁷ the purpose of the hymns was to conjure gods to the sacrifice, propitiate them, and win their favor.⁸

In the well-known “Creation hymns,” found in the very last chapter of the *Rig-Veda*, which is distinctly different from the preceding nine chapters, we have some evidence for “the Aryan Hypothesis.” It is here that we see the *Rig Vedic* sage (pre-Aryan, Dravidian and other peoples of India)⁹ crave for religious truth, as to how the great *Visvakarman* (male) generated the external, empirical, experiential world of heaven and earth observed outside of the body (RV. 10.72; 81; 90; 121). Here we also see their metaphysical introspection and rational quest as to how the Creator is ‘different’ from primal matter (‘*moola-prakriti*’ R.V. 10.82.2), how the Creator is the ‘golden seed’ (*hiranya-garbha*), and the formless moving mass (R.V. 10.129) This quest for the ‘*Vedic Brahman*’ is not

(*Uttamapurusha*), a significant shift from the older theory that the creation of the world depended on a primeval sacrifice (p. 251: Br.U. i.4).

⁶ Dhavamony, *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 55.

⁷ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 47-56.

⁸ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1967), 58.

⁹ Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 60. This “Aryan Hypothesis” will be explained below in page 120.

purely metaphysical, but also religious. These hypotheses in the *Vedas* about a Creator God, the ‘All-One,’ who is time, breath, austerity, greatness and *Brahman* (*kala, prana, tapas and Brahman*)¹⁰ were later raised into the status of the ‘Absolute *Brahman*’ in the *Upanishads*. The key issue in all these religious speculations is the nature of the Absolute: Is the Absolute an impersonal principle or a personal God? ¹¹ We can see a series of game-changes from the Creator god *Visvakarman* to *Purusha-Sukhta*, *Hiranyagarbha* and the *Brahman* of the *Rig Veda*, the Absolute *Brahman* of the *Upanishads*, and eventually, the Personal God of the *Gita*. Do we see the origin of the *Purushothama* (the Highest Spirit) of the *Gita* in the *Purusha-Sukhta* of the *Rig Veda*?

1. 2 THE UPANISHADS AND BHAKTI

IS THERE *BHAKTI* IN THE *UPANISHADS*?

At first, the *Upanishadic* sages with enquiring minds lost their grip on the *Vedic* hymns overlaid with endless rituals and sacrifices. They started seeking an essentially intellectual explanation for the beginnings of the world. The fundamental character of the principles of their religious quest is cold, impersonal, and speculative. The *Upanishadic* sage’s first eager quest and philosophical speculation was ‘the One Ultimate’ cause of the universe, *tat ekam*. Because the quest has not grown old, and their cosmogonic theories had not been superseded, they continued to look for new explanations. The woman philosopher, Gargi’s question to Yajnavalkya, whether all the ‘warp and woof’ of the

¹⁰ Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 77: This *Vedic* Brahman was power or “*sakti*” in the subsequent centuries.

¹¹ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 57-58.

world is woven on water (Br.U.3.6; 5.5)¹² reminds one of Thales who thought that the origin of the world was water. Both in the *Vedas* and here, the quest was metaphysical and religious:

From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light.
From death lead me to immortality (Br. U. 1.3.28).

Resembling the early Greek cosmologists, e.g., Xenophanes, who looked up into the expanse of the skies and said, "The One is God,"¹³ the Upanishadic sages were advancing intellectual and speculative theories of causation of the whole world from some primordial material. By intuition they discovered the inherent unity of all things and this intelligent monism was accepted by all their descendents throughout the centuries. Every philosophic system in India referred to the *Upanishads* for authority: the atheistic *Carvakas*, non-orthodox Buddhists, orthodox *Purva-meemamsa*, *Nyaya-Vaisesika* and *Sankhya-Yoga* sought support from the *Upanishads*.¹⁴

1.3 The Upanishadic *bhakti*

In the course of time, within the *Upanishads*, new inquiries arose about the origin of all kinds of material things and human beings. They looked inwards for answers to the fundamental question: What is the innermost self (*atman*) of all things and of individual human beings? What or who is the real power behind all the functions of the universe, internal in human beings and external to them in nature. Different Upanishadic scholars

¹² Br. U is Brihadaranyaka *Upanishad*. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 58. Who is this One Reality, *satyasya satyam*? In Chapter 3 of the Brahmadharanyaka *Upanishad* Ajatasatru defines Brahman as the 'real of the real' as the 'true Self of all self,' 'the inner controller,' the 'thinker beyond thought,' the 'understander not understood,' the 'warp and the woof of all things,' 'other than the world, but controlling it from within.'

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.5.

¹⁴ Hiriyanna, *Outlines*, 89, 107.

thought differently, while some rejected answers with a “Neti! Neti!” or “No, No” (BrU. 1V.v.16), the Unlimited is inscrutable (BrU. 1.iv.1-5, 7); (Kena U. 1.3. ii.1, 3, 5) cannot be defined by the limited. If living beings are undergoing change (*kshara*) and death, and Brahman alone is unchanging (*akshara*), *Brahman* must be the “Real of the Real” *satyasya-satyam* (BrU. 11. i. 20; iii.6); *Brahman* is the inner controller (BrU. 111.vii.15, 23), the inmost self, the ‘unseen-seer,’ the hearer, the thinker beyond thought, the understander not understood, the ‘warp and the woof’ of all things; It is other than the world but controlling it from within (BrU. 111. viii. 6-8,11).

The *Upanishads* have a diversity of doctrinal and religious trends, and there is an evolution of thought within them. The dominant trend is the ‘Brahman-Atman equation,’ that is, the Oneness of the ultimate ground of all existence and the ultimate consciousness of the self in man. The early *Upanishads* show this mystical speculative equation: The *Mandukya* opens with the words, “This whole world is *Brahman*; the self is *Brahman*” (*Mandukya* 1.1), and the *Chandogya* also has these words (Chand.U.7.xxv.1-2); the realization of ‘that One’ (*tad ekam*) is *jnana* that leads to liberation. Another early *Upanishad*, the *Brihadaranyaka*, declares, “*Brahman* is *Atman*” (BrU. 11.i. 2-13), and “Whoever knows “I am Brahman” (*aham brahma asmi*) becomes “this All” (BrU. 1.iv.10). The ‘non-dualistic’ trend is clearly seen in Yajnavalkya’s teaching in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, “this self is *Brahman*” (“*ayam atma brahma*” BrU. 1.iv.17), and in Uddalaka’s words to Svetaketu in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (V1.xii.1-3), “That thou art” (“*tat tvam asi*”).¹⁵

¹⁵ There are four parallel *Vedic mahavakyas* (great aphorisms): ‘*prajnanan Brahma* (Rig Veda), *aham Brahma asmi* (Yajur Veda), and *tat-tvam asi* (Sama Veda) *ayam atma Brahma* (Atharva Veda).

However, despite this non-dualistic outlook, in the later *Upanishads*, such as the *Katha* (c.500 BCE), there is a glimmering of an evolution of thinking towards theism, and the *Svetasvatara* (c. 250-200 BCE) contains the fullest expression of the theistic belief to be found in the *Upanishads*. The nameless and formless *Brahman* is replaced by gods with names and attributes. God is called “*Isvara*” in the *Isa* and *Katha Upanishads*, and “*Rudra-Siva*” in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*. The relationship between the world and God is concealed (immanent) as in the fire-drill and the butter-milk, and like the spider and the web it produces according to its desire. The worshippers are exhorted to have their *bhakti* (devotion) directed towards the Absolute, who is identified with one of the *Vedic* gods, Rudra-Siva. Worship becomes more fervent than the *Vedic* sacrifice had been. Greater importance is given to personal experience than to the corporate ceremonies of the earlier period, and a new value to Siva as religious teacher (*guru*).¹⁶

The difference between universal Self and the individual human self (*paramatman* and *jivatman*) is distinct. There is also a metaphysical difference between matter and spirit: the *Sankhya prakriti / purusha* duality that had become a unity under *Vedantic* monism has again become distinct in the *bhakti* religion as One God and the innumerable human beings (the One and the Many). The famous passage in the *Satapada Brahmana* (10.6.3) is said to contain the earliest definition of the Hindu concept of God, repeated in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, where *Brahman* is called:

This whole, that transcends the world, for it is greater than the great and indwells the human self as something smaller than a grain of rice (*Ch U 3.14.3-4*).

Brahman is the cause of the ‘phenomenal world’:

¹⁶ A. J. Appasamy, *The BhagavadGita*, (Tirupati: Venkateswara University Press, 1971), 121. This is one of the lectures given at the *Gita* Conference. The Anglican Bishop, Appasamy, is a Tamil scholar and writer.

As a spider is the cause of the web it spins, and as the fire is the cause of the tiny sparks that leap out of it, and as the fire of the smoke, so from this self issue all life-breaths (*prana*), all worlds, all gods, all contingent beings. The ‘hidden meaning’ (*rahasyam*, *Upanishad*) of the above is the ‘Real of the real’ (*satyasya satya* (*Br.Up.* 2.1.20)).

But distinctly different is the idea of God as origin, sustainer, and indweller of the universe and of the human self’ slowly begins to emerge; God is also the final cause similar to the ocean that receives all the rivers. ‘That is Atman: that thou art, my son, Svetaketu’ equates the individual self with the Universal Atman (*Chand.Up.*6:10.1).

The tendency towards a conception of God is seen in referring to *Brahman* (Self) and *purusha* (person), as Creator of all, or king of all (*Br. Up.* 2.5.14-15; 4.4.10). In the *Katha Upanishad*, the personal god Yama is also the impersonal *Brahman*: Yama is the Lord of both the ideal world of *Brahman* and the becoming world of *Isvara*; *purusha* is often used to mean the supreme God.¹⁷ Further, the *Katha Upanishad* teaches the doctrine of grace, that the Soul cannot be obtained by instruction or the intellect or learning but by He who reveals Himself to whom He chooses (*Katha U.*2.23; *Mundaka U.* 3.2.3).

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* is called the ‘gateway of Hinduism’ as it boldly opposes the ‘*atmavada*’ assertion (*Brahman-Atman* equation) of the early *Upanishads* with its own *Isvaravada* (*Isvara-Alone*-assertion), that it is not *Atman* but God who is the origin and the end of all. It rejects *Brahman* and establishes God (*Rudra-Siva*) as presiding over causes, time and self (*Sv. U.*1.3). *Siva* combines the divine of the early *Upanishads*: (unmanifest *Brahman*) and the highest spiritual aspects of the human into

¹⁷ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 59. Refer also to R. C. Zaehner, “*Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*”, (University of London, 1960), 42 ff; and “*At Sundry Times*”, London, 1958), 104-15.

itself. *Rudra-Siva* is Creator, *Prajapati*, *Hiranyagarbha*, and *Visvakarman* of the ancient *Vedas* and the *guru* (Sv.U 6.16).¹⁸

Another Game-Change

Theism enters Hinduism again; *bhakti* appears suddenly in the late *Upanishads*

Summing up, *bhakti* in the strict sense of ‘love of God,’ is not present at all in the *Upanishads*, except for some references to a God who is differentiated from the individual soul in the *Katha Upanishad*; but it is clearly in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*. Even in the latter, the word *bhakti* (love) is used only once in the last verse (6.23) of its last chapter, and *prasada* (grace) in 6.21. And even in verse 23, *bhakti* is not between God and the devotee but between the teacher (*guru*) and the student (*sisya*). Not even words akin to love such as compassion (*karuna*) are found in any *Upanishad*.¹⁹

This absence of love in all the *Upanishads* and its sudden appearance in the last chapter of a later *Upanishad*, the *Svetasvatara*, is as surprising as the absence of the theistic Creation in the whole of the *Vedas* and its sudden appearance in its last chapter. It is possible that *Svetasvatara*’s poetry and the theistic Creation songs (1.3; 6.16) were already extant in the *Vedic* times, but were made canonical much later. Fr. Dhavamony considers that the last verses (6.21, 23) of this late *Upanishad* and the last chapter of the *Rig Veda* may be later interpolations.²⁰ Although the *Svetasvatara* contains all the

¹⁸ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 61-63, 67: It is in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, which is the ‘gateway of Hinduism,’ and especially of all philosophical Saivism, that the supreme God, Rudra-Siva, is identified *atman* or *purusha*. This *Upanishad* attempts a new synthesis of *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* doctrines under the aegis of the personal God (the *Deva*) and crowns the ancient spiritual ways with the doctrines of grace and *bhakti* to Siva. Whereas Rudra was an outcast god in the *Vedas*, as Rudra-Siva, he is the auspicious, gracious, the transcendent and immanent Lord and the God of devotional worship (Sv. U. 1.3; 6.16ff).

¹⁹ Robert Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads: Translated from the Sanskrit, with an outline of the philosophy of the Upanishads*, 2nd Ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 411.

²⁰ Wendy Doniger-O’Flaherty, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 164 and 252.

requirements of theism, it is only possible to say that monotheism is still in the making at this stage since the personal God and the impersonal Absolute are assimilated here.²¹

1. 4 THE EPICS AND *BHAKTI*

Is there loving devotion (*bhakti*) in the two epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*?

We see a developed form of Hindu religious practice in the *Mahabharata*, claimed to be the fifth Veda, and a revered Hindu ideal in the *Ramayana*. Although the epics are works of history, there are philosophical discussions of the four *purusharthas*: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, the four spheres of human action: (right way of living, making wealth, living in the family and liberation). The *Mahabharata* takes for granted the structure of the society already existing, as classes and castes, without recognizing the need to, or necessity for, social action to change it. Hence Yudhishtira, his cousins and kings from all quarters of India had to fight the fratricidal battle as *kshatriyas*, and preserve and continue the social framework.

The classical period with *Sanskrit* as the language of the holy writ comes to an end, when the epics and the *puranas* arrive as the *smrtis*, the storehouses of devotional Hinduism. Both epics have played an important role in the development of popular Hindu religious thought open to all people irrespective of caste and class. Official Hinduism was originated with the *Veda* as the sacred book and source of infallible wisdom; it was saved by and for the highest caste, the *Brahmins*, and could be accessed only by the other two twice-born castes. The lower caste *sudras*, women, (even the *Brahmin* women), and the 'out-castes' were forbidden access to the *Veda*. The *Upanishads* too were forbidden to

²¹ Hiriyanna, *Outline of Indian Philosophy*, 83. The requirements of theism are belief in God, the soul and the world, and the conviction that devotion to God is the true means of salvation.

these dis-enfranchised groups. Even if they knew *Sanskrit*, they were forbidden to read the scriptures. It was, then, largely to satisfy the needs of these three lower groups that the *puranas* and the *smritis* were written in their regional vernaculars. This practice is similar to the way the protestant hymns were written in German and other European languages when Latin was hidden from the public by the Roman Catholic Church in the Reformation period. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, open to all, was the chief *smriti*; paradoxically, it was also called the last *Upanishad*; and as such, part of the *prasthanatreya*.²²

With the coming of the *puranas* and the *smritis* in the local vernaculars, a long-awaited need, *bhakti* was born as a new type of religion, bearing the love of God for all people. An extensive literature began to develop throughout India, which the people could understand and express themselves. This was the triumph of *bhakti*, the loving adoration of a personal God representing the third phase of Hinduism, the two former phases being the *Vedic*-*Upanishadic*, and the *Epic*. This grand transformation is reflected in the Neo-Vedantin philosophies of later Hinduism which rejected the classic monist ontology elaborated by the great Sankara in the ninth century AD.²³

In Hinduism, *bhakti* is often employed in the sense of both secular and religious love. In the religious context, it expresses not only man's love of God but also God's love for man. As the lower castes and the untouchables were not allowed to learn *Sanskrit* in which the *smritis* were written, and were not allowed to read the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* (*srutis*) even if they knew *Sanskrit* somehow, the epics and the *puranas* (*smritis*) were written for their consumption in several local languages. However, the low

²² Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 10-12.

²³ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 13.Chronology

castes knew that they could not hope to attain *moksha* or liberation by reading the *smrtis* alone for, without the *srutis* they will have to go through the cycle of births.

In the epic *Mahabharata*, a *smriti*, the word ‘love’ (*bhāj*) is used in several ways. We see the impersonal secular use of *bhāj* at the wedding of Nala who says to his wife Damayanti that she ‘partakes’ of him, a mortal, for her lot in the presence of the gods (MBh. 3.Nalopakhyana, 5. 31); and in the *Ramayana*, Queen Kaikeyi desires (loves) her son Bharata to be crowned as King (R. 2.11.28). Dharuma pleads to Indra to let his dog go with him into Indra’s heaven because the dog is devoted to him (*bhakta*).

The *Mahabharata* uses *bhakti* for secular human love outside of sex also, as in the sense of a king who was the darling of his devoted or loyal subjects (*bhaktavatsala*, MBh.17.3), loyalty to the king as *raja-bhakti* (MBh. 5. 3.59). *Bhakti* comes as respect for the ‘fidelity’ of Savitri to her husband (MBh. 3. Savitr. Pativr, 401-402). *Bhakti* from men to God is seen rarely as in what Yudhishtira says, “Blame not the Creator God *Brahma*, through whose grace (*prasada*) mortal devotees get immortality” (MBh. 3. 31, 41 ff); but *bhakti* of God to man is absent.

1. 5 THE ORIGIN OF BHAKTI

Bhakti is essentially pre-Aryan, non-Aryan, Dravidian. Below is a brief survey of the vast range of the *bhakti* movements in India. Scholars who have traced the doctrine of *bhakti* in the early *Sanskrit* sacred writings do not find much evidence that point to the Aryan origin of *bhakti*. The hymns and the *Brahmanas* of the *Vedic* theistic period are so overlaid with sacrifices and rituals for nature gods such as *Agni*, *Indra* and *Varuna*, that there was no place for the kind of *bhakti* that we see in the *Gita* later.

In time, the focus moved away from the deities to *Vedic* ritualism, sacrificial excesses, asceticism and the growing domination of the Brahmin priesthood - and a general frustration with externals. The *Upanishadic Brahmanism*²⁴ of the next period moved away from the *Vedic* rituals and insisted on an intellectual religious quest, which is fundamentally impersonal and speculative. Brahmanism's 'liberation' (*moksha*) was the realization of the soul's complete identity with the Absolute, which alone is real.

In contrast, the object of the *bhakti* religion is the God of definite nature and many attributes; he is a loving protector, master and friend, as in the *Gita*. 'Salvation,' in the *bhakti* religion, means oneness with the personal God through love (*bhakti*).²⁵ In the *bhakti* religion visual representations of the God, in images of *Siva* or *Vishnu* or the latter's *avatars* such as Krishna are used in worship (*puja*), but there is relatively little stress on ritualism or asceticism.

Worship of images was prevalent in the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan civilizations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, but absent in Rigvedic theism. None of the favorite gods of the *bhakti* cult of Hinduism is prominent in the Aryan religion: *Siva* is pre-figured as *Rudra*, and *Vishnu* is a minor god mentioned just six times in the *Rig Veda*. It is significant that these two gods, *Siva* and *Vishnu*, have "attained their real stature in conjunction with the non-Aryan elements of *bhakti* that contributed to the transformation of Brahmanism into Hinduism."²⁶

²⁴ The two words 'Brahmanism' and 'Brahminism' are different. Brahmanism is the religion of the Absolute Reality, and Brahminism is the culture of the Brahmins, the Aryan priestly uppermost caste.

²⁵ Liberation or *moksha* or spiritual freedom is the spiritual goal of both Hindus and the Buddhists. (See notes Zaehner, 28-36). To be discussed separately in this paper.

²⁶ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 97.

Wendy Doniger wonders if Hinduism needed such a synthesis of the previous strands of religion to meet the challenges of Buddhism and Jainism at this time. For by now, the Buddha and the Jaina had successfully established their paradigm of religious movement centered upon the human being. The *bhakti* movement, therefore, counters Buddhism and Jainism by the *avatars* (Krishna and Rama), who were believed to be more powerful than the *Vedic* gods because they derive direct power from God (*Vishnu*) and have grounding in humanity.²⁷ The game-change in later Buddhism includes divinization of the Buddha, devotion, images and chants.

However, Brahmanism being exclusively priestly, hierarchical, aristocratic, parochial, and Brahminic,²⁸ withholding the *Vedas* and the *Sanskrit* language from the lower castes and all women, including Brahmin women, it could not resist the *bhakti* cult that had a universal appeal. The Hindu saints of the '*bhakti* Renaissance' (12th-17th centuries) were great reformers as well, protesting against inequalities and seeking to broaden the religion and suppress the restrictions of caste. Ramanuja, as we will see, was such an example, who chose even some of his disciples from the low caste.

This is a complex period of Indian history when the Iranic Aryan Brahmanic religion of the Indus Valley amalgamated with the local Hinduism of the Gangetic plains; and the northern Indian civilization mixed with that in the Dravidian South India. The movement toward the south was not of a Veda-based Aryan north, but a Hindu North consisting of Aryan and non-Aryan elements.²⁹ This paper is too short to discuss this period fully, but

²⁷ Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2009). 223.

²⁸ *Brahminic* is different from Brahmanic: *Brahminic* is to do with the *Brahmin* caste, and Brahmanic with the Absolute One, although there is an association of the *Brahmin*'s belief in the *Brahmanic* belief system.

²⁹ M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 98.

we will see how the *Gita* responded to this great merging of racial, cultural and religious elements.

The notion of *bhakti* appears in two of the late *Upanishads*, *Katha* and *Svetasvatara*; it is more explicit in the very last verse of the latter (6.21). Scholars of the early history of Hinduism do not think that Brahmanism developed into a *bhakti* religion independent of the non-Aryan *bhakti* cult, but that Brahmanism grew into Hinduism by assimilating and syncretising the non-Brahmanic religious elements in India, i.e., Buddhism, Jainism, Sankhya-Yoga, Nyaya-Vaisesika, and the *bhakti* cult. *Bhakti* was native to India, not borrowed from Christianity, but arose from the deep religiosity inherent in the human soul.³⁰ Even so, it makes one wonder if elements of Judeo-Christianity also were assimilated at this time (before and after Christ) when travelers, traders and soldiers from Greece, Rome, Palestine, Iran and Afghanistan visited India because the words ‘love’ and ‘grace’ which are almost non-existent in early Hindu texts are suddenly profuse in the *Gita*, even more than *karuna* and *ahimsa* drawn from Buddhism.³¹

³⁰ M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 97.

³¹ A. L. Basham, *Wonder that was India*, 61; 345; 482-83, Plate LXXXV11. Basham maintains “that Saint Thomas preached in India is by no means impossible” (p. 61), and he repeats ... “that the Thomas tradition is believable: any enterprising missionary could have easily traveled from Palestine to India.” Alexander the Great could come into north-west India (326 BCE) with his large army of horses and chariots along the roads in the Himalayan mountain ranges; after his time the roads to India were made even better by the Romans. That India’s communications and trade with the west is historical is suggested by the Greek and Roman gold and silver coins of the first three centuries BC and AD dug out from Bactria and north-west India (Plate LXXXV11) and Madurai in south India. D. Devakala Jotimani, *The origin and Growth of Tamil Bhakti Margam: from the perspective of the Bible* (Madras: DRT Press, 1997), Plates 46 and 47. The necessity for Emperor Asoka to inscribe in Aramaic, the language of the Jews, in the rock edicts in Kandahar and Taxilla shows the possibility of a sizeable Jewish population very close to India.

1. 6 THE TAMIL *BHAKTI* MOVEMENT

There are the Sangam Tamil literary works of the early centuries of the Christian era that show that the Dravidians of South India were evolving their own *bhakti* cult around their own gods such as *Sivan, Murugan and Mayon* at least from this time. Some would give an earlier date from literary sources such as *Patthu-pattu* and *Ettu-thohai* where the native south Indian gods are described. All the same, during this process, they were absorbing north Indian religious concepts too.

But from the sixth century CE onwards, the Tamil mystics influenced the *bhakti* movement to develop vigorously. Some would put down the mystic Tiru-moolar, one of the earliest *Siddhars*, to the fifth century CE. Professor Zaehner describes the Tamil *bhakti* movement as an impassioned cry against the ossified ceremonial religion of the Brahmans and the ideal of passionlessness, which they shared with the Buddhists and the Jains.³² This *bhakti* movement spread throughout India and brought about the disappearance of Buddhism in the country. This fact is confirmed by the *Sanskrit* sources also.³³

³² R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962), 171.

³³ *Bhagavata Purana*, 11. 5. 39-41. This ninth century (CE) source pays a tribute to the Tamils who fostered *bhakti*, and describes the whole of the peninsular India as its birth place. A similar passage in “*Padma purana*” (*Uttara Kanda* 189. 51) gives similar information by lovely poetry depicting *bhakti* as a mother telling her own story of being born in the Tamil country and losing her two sons *jnana* and *Vairagya*). *Padma purana* also belongs to the late ninth century CE. We have to be cautious in accepting historic evidence from poetry, but there must have been such a tradition when they were written.

CHAPTER TWO

**The Use of the *Gita* for *bhakti*:
BhagavadGita bhakti Verses**

Bhakti is *Gita*'s Priority.

The *Gita* text as a whole supports this hypothesis.

The verse-count of *bhakti* in the *Gita* confirms this hypothesis.

Therefore the hypothesis is true.

Pre-view

As we are examining the *BhagavadGita* for evidence in its *bhakti* verses, it is important to look for the word *bhakti* and its synonymous and closely related words: love, grace, affection, worship, devotion, loyalty, participation, communion, reverence, offering, friendship or relationships such as indwelling, and subsisting. The term 'revere' is usually used in relation to Brahmanic veneration, not loving devotion to God. This thesis uses the translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* by Zaehner, except when the reference is from another source; and uses the word 'self' to mean 'soul'. The usage of abbreviations is as denoted in the footnote below.³⁴

It is the study of the *bhakti* verses that open our vision to the genuine purport of the *Gita*. This paper prefers to use the word *bhakti* (loving devotion) to the term love or grace (*daya*, *prasada* or *anugraha*); *bhakti* means human devotional love of, and for, God; love is reciprocal between God and human beings, while grace is unilateral from God to humanity. Hindu *bhakti* is not the same as the Christian love (Agape). *Bhakti*'s grace is close to the "grace" of the Bible, but perhaps not so expressive. In this respect, Saivism and Vaishnavism – the later developed forms of *bhakti* religions of Hinduism – are much

³⁴ In this paper S refers to Sankara, R to Ramanuja, Rk to Radhakrishnan, CB to Chit-bhavananda, Z to Zaehner, and 'n' to notes.

The *Upanishads* are denoted by their initial letters; the chapters and sections by Roman numerals; the verses by Arabic numerals.

closer to the Christian idea of love and grace than the *Gita*. Although the Tamil word *anbu* is a good parallel of *bhakti*, this paper uses the latter as it is better known to most readers.

In order to probe the heart of the *Gita*, first a word-search was made for *bhakti* in the *Gita*, and then the term was studied in its context. This showed the distribution of the occurrences of the word *bhakti* in the *Gita*, and the methodology used to concentrate the word in certain sections of the text. This demonstrated that *bhakti* is a new concept for a new way of life toward the final goal of *moksha*. I do not claim, however, that my word count of *bhakti* is complete.

It is necessary to ask at this point, whether this ‘highest mystery’ that Krishna is preaching in the *Gita* to Arjuna (4.3) is a new (original) teaching or a renewal (rediscovery) of an ancient (*puratana*) teaching (4.1; 3).³⁵ The word “original” has many meanings. R. C. Zaehner and P. M. Thomas take ‘original’ to mean ‘unique,’ whereas Radhakrishnan takes it to mean ‘initial.’ As Vishnu teaches a new *dharma* or mode of living in every *avatar* (birth) of His, in His Krishna-*avatar*, He is teaching a new mode of living, *bhakti*. Krishna argues that since the ‘mode of life’ He had taught to Vivasvat in one of His previous *avatars* (4.1) had been lost in the long period of oral transmission (4.2), in this present *avatar*, He (Krishna), is preaching His primeval highest mystery, *bhakti*, today, to His *bhakta* (loyal devoted friend) Arjuna. (4.3). This declaration is to be

³⁵ R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1973) 181: ‘the new teaching is the original mode of life that Krishna taught to the royal sages, Vivasvat, Manu etc was lost in the oral transmission.’ P. M. Thomas, *The BhagavadGita: Tilak, Gandhi & Aurobindo in 20th Century Indian Interpretation of the BhagavdGita* (Bangalore: ISPCK, Delhi, 1987), 12, n: *bhakti* is a ‘new teaching’; Krishna does not relate the lost “Supreme Secret” to the *Vedas*.

S. Radhakrishnan, *The BhagavadGita* (London: George Allen Unwin, 1971), 152: This teaching to Arjuna is a ‘renewal,’ a rediscovery, a restoration of knowledge long forgotten.”

taken as the internal, textual validation of authenticity of the new teaching of *bhakti yoga* to His *bhakta* by the *Gita*'s author, Krishna himself—for *bhakti* is a new topic that has never been written about in any *Sanskrit* Hindu text.

It is important to know that philosophy (*darsana*) is a 'vision' of 'Reality and Truth' by means of valid knowledge accepted by the group.³⁶ With this mysterious 'highest truth about truth' (*rahasyam-uttamam*), Krishna replaces the Upanishadic *satyasya-satya* (the truth of the truth) which is *Brahman* itself, imparted by the *guru* to his pupil or son (Chandogya U 6.29): in the *Gita*, Krishna, the *guru*, is imparting His mystical *mantra* of love to His pupil, Arjuna (4.3). Love is a new teaching in Hinduism at this stage.

To appreciate this verse (4.3) better, we should understand the methodology behind Krishna's argument: Krishna first rejects the ancient (*purva*) teaching before he introduces his new teaching (today). This method is called *Purvapaksha-siddhanta*, which is used generally in all Indian philosophical work: first, the opponent's view (*Purvapaksha*) is stated, and then, after this view is rejected, one gives the final view (*siddhanta*). In the *Gita*, Krishna first rejects Krishna's own primal revelation because it had become stale with time, and been lost; and then He preaches His highest new revelation (*bhakti*) to replace the old (*purva*). He recognizes the existence of other points of view (of Reality), and goes beyond them to present his own new view (*siddhanta* or new Truth). Of these two words for love, *bhakti* and *daya*, *bhakti* turns out to be the more dominant in the *Gita*, occurring some 41 times; grace is sparse with only three

³⁶ V. A. Devasenapati, *Philosophical Heritage of the Tamils* (Madras: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1983), vii: explains the two methods used for philosophical exposition: *purvapaksha-siddhanta* and *prasna-uttara*. In the latter method the *guru* answers the questions raised by his students or others.

J. L. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 145: The word, "*darsana*" is derived from the root, "*drs*" (=to see). Philosophy in the Indian view has something to do with "seeing." Accordingly, philosophy (*darsana*), in India, was an intensely intellectual, rigorously discursive and relentlessly critical pursuit.

occurrences; *bhakti* is most numerous in the ninth, twelfth and the eighteenth chapters, with the seventh chapter coming next as shown below.

TABLE: 2

Distribution of <i>bhakti</i> verses in the <i>Gita</i>'s eighteen chapters																	
Chapters: 1 2 3 4 5 6 <u>7</u> 8 <u>9</u> 10 11 <u>12</u> 13 14 15 16 17 <u>18</u>																	
Verses: - - - 2 - 2 <u>7</u> <u>2</u> <u>9</u> 3 3 <u>10</u> 1 1 1 - - <u>7</u>																	
The number of <i>bhakti</i> verses 48																	
The Central section of the <i>Gita</i> (Chapters 7-12) focuses on God and <i>bhakti</i> .																	
The last verses (of Chapter 18) of the <i>Gita</i> form the grand climax of God and <i>bhakti</i> .																	

The pattern of distribution of the key word *bhakti* confirms the fact that *bhakti* is the essential message of the *Gita*. The message of *bhakti* develops in three stages: In chapters 1-6 the spotlight is mainly on the captain of the team, the Absolute Brahman, the star player, the 'man-of-steady-wisdom' (2.72), with the *sannyasa*, *jnana* and *karma yogis* in the background. Chapters 7-12, by contrast, focuses on God, and His winning team of free-spirits, the *bhaktas* (loving devotees) revealing the superiority of God over Brahman. In chapters 13-18 the message concentrates on the supreme, loving and gracious God, the mystery of His victory (final salvation) through the strategy of joyous *bhakti*.

In the first section of the *Gita*, the subject matter is a necessary preface to the supreme *bhakti* for it speaks of God only as the object of meditation, the individual self as being immortal and of the stuff of Brahman. It describes the ideal *yogin* as someone of steady wisdom marching like an athlete towards liberation; this integrated individual self reaches the immortal state of Brahman which is *Nirvana* too. This state of the athlete is

similar to the 'flame without flicker in a windless place' (6.19), but still imperfect: *bhakti* leads him to final victory (salvation) in the next two stages.

The second section embodies the central message of the *Gita*: God in all His majesty is not just the object of meditation (*yoga*) and knowledge (*jnana*) of the scriptures; both are possible for only a few athletes of the spirit; but God, rather, is the object of love and surrender which are open to all through the easy path of *bhakti*.

As the ideal *yogi*, though fully integrated in *Brahman*, is still imperfect without *bhakti*; he has now to be integrated in God too through *bhakti*, and become a *bhakta*: loyal, devoted, and devout in order to attain liberation because the Personal God is higher than *Nirvana* which is *Brahman* too. The already integrated wise *yogin* is purified by *bhakti* alone to participate in God (13. 18); he approaches God (14. 15) and participates in God's nature: he abides in God and God in him (9. 29).

In the third and last stage comes the revelation of the mystery of the immeasurable love of God towards the *bhakta* who is contented in abiding or possessing God's love through *bhakti* (18. 51-5; 65). But the concept that even when God dwells in the *bhakta*, the *bhakta* is distinct from God, who is the object of his *bhakti*, is characteristic of the *Gita*, *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism*, in contrast to *Advaitism*, where the individual loses his own identity in his union with God: That thou art and That I am (*tat tvam asi; aham Brahma asmi*). In the following section, we will trace the golden thread of *bhakti* that runs through the *Gita*.

CHAPTER 2: LIST of BHAKTI VERSES in the GITA (love 48, grace 2, mercy 1, compassion 1, worship 6)

4 .3: My comrade *bhakta*, My mysterious preaching to you today: the same Primeval mode of life.

4.11: Whatever way *bhaktas* approach Me, in the same way I return their love... *annya-bhakti*

6. 31: The fully integrated athlete should become a **bhakta**: This is the climax of chapter 6.
6. 47: The best athlete is the one who subsumes in Me: trusts, honors, **loves** and is absorbed in Me.
7. 16: Four types of *karma-bhaktas*: Low: those afflicted, seek wisdom, seek gain; know *jnana*.
- 7.17: Of the ‘integrated *jnani*s,’ I’m **dear** to those who **love** and **worship** Me as they’re **dear** to Me
- 7.18: ‘Integrated *jnana*,’ the highest way of *prapatti* is to be as dependent on God as God is on him
7. 20: Trust (**worship**) of ‘*annya* gods’ is forced by inherent *gunas* as desire sweeps wisdom away.
7. 21: If with faith a **bhakta** desires to honor ‘*annya* forms’, I confirm that faith unswerving.
7. 22: Faithful **worship** of other gods may give small gains of desires, but I am the true dispenser.
7. 23: Unwise **worshippers** desire temporary rewards, go to other gods; My **bhaktas** come to Me.
8. 10: In death-bed by **bhakti** on Personal God and *yoga* exercises, not *yoga* alone, he goes to Him.
8. 22: The highest Personal God is to be won by **loving** *ananya bhakti*; in Him all beings subsist.
9. 22: Those who always **meditate** on Me & honor Me alone with *jnana* will keep what they attain.
9. 25: **Worshippers** of gods, ancestors or dead-spirits go to them; My **worshippers** come to Me.
9. 26: Offer Me even a leaf, flower or fruit with **love**: I accept it willingly as an offering of **love**.
9. 27: All action, eating, offering, giving alms or doing penance be self-sacrifice **arpanam** to Me.
9. 29: I am in all *jivas*; I **love** them equally; those who **love**, commune and abide in Me, I in them.
9. 30: Whatever one’s caste duty may be, if he resolves to **love** no only Me; he’ll be seen as good.
9. 31: None who **worships** in **love** and with **loyalty** is ever lost to Me – he will win eternal rest.
9. 33: So it is easier for Brahmins, Kshatriyas, who know the theory of **bhakti** to love Me in praxis.
9. 34: The integrated *yukta* striving with mind, *yoga*, *tyaga*, **loving service** to Me to come to Me.
10. 8: The wise know I’m the source of all are fulfilled **communing** with Me in **love** and **affection**.
10. 10: To **bhaktas** **communing with Me in love** I give integration of the self to draw near Me.
11. 31: You cruel incomprehensible being, have ‘**mercy**’ on Me; who are you; what are you doing?
11. 54 Only by *ananya-bhakti* to Me, I can be known and seen as I Am - my **lovers** can enter Me.
11. 55: They’ll come to Me their goal, who **love** Me **loyally**, serve, live un-attached and virtuous.
12. 1: Your **bhaktas**, or those who **revere** Brahman, who are more advanced in spiritual exercise?

12. 6: Those who do exclusive *works*, **devotion**, *meditation*, to Me alone do Me honor.
12. 13: Those without hatred, but are **friendly**, **compassionate** and has the *brahma-viharas* I **love**.
12. 14: I return the **love** of those contented, mind integrated, soul steeped in Me w. **loving devotion**
12. 15: **I love** him who does not shrink away from people, people do not shrink f him, not proud...
12. 16: **I love** the man equanimous, *parityagi* who gives up selfish works or gains, *phalatyagi*
12. 17: **I love** the **devoted devout** balanced, not mourn loss, discards pleasant & unpleasant things
- 12: 18-19: **I love** the **devoted** man, same to good and evil, praise and blame; silent; steady minded
12. 20: **I love** greatly my **devotees** who revere my eternal righteous words, believe Me as the goal.
- 13: 10: Commends unswerving *bhakti* + ascetic attitudes, separate from society and silence cf 7-11
18. 62: In Him alone you seek refuge w. all yr being, all yr **love**; by His **grace** you attain salvation.
13. 18: If a *bhakta* knows Brahma-vidya, he is fit to share in My joy.
14. 26: I support those with **loving loyalty**, spir. exercise beyond the gunas, before- after liberation.
- 15.19: Who knows Me as the sublime person knows all, and communes with Me with all his **love**.
18. 64: My highest mysterious word to you is **I love you well.**; So I will tell you of your salvation.
18. 65: **Love Me**; think of Me; **worship Me**; sacrifice, prostrate to Me, you are **dear to Me**.
18. 67: Do not tell of **My love** to unbelievers who have no **love** and **loyalty** for Me.
18. 68: But tell my highest mystery to my **loving devotees** who show **loving loyalty** to Me.
18. 69: Nobody renders more **pleasing service** to Me than this man; no man is **loved by Me** more.
18. 73: My confusion & ignorance have gone by **your grace** (*prasada*); I stand ready to obey you.

48 verses use the word, “love” 83 times; “mercy” once (11. 31), compassion twice (12. 13), grace twice (12. 13, 18. 62; 73), worship six times (7.20; 22-23; 8.9; 9.22, 25).

2.1 EXAMINATION OF THE GITA VERSES ON *BHAKTI* IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

With this brief introduction, we can now examine the *Gita* verses on *bhakti* to examine if the proposition that ‘the purport of the *Gita* is *bhakti*,’ is really true. As stated above, the first six chapters are almost devoid of references to *bhakti* except for two

verses in chapter four (4.3; 11), and another two verses in chapter six. According to Ramanuja, the reason for this absence of *bhakti* in these six chapters is that they are 'Brahmanical' or they talk about the acquisition of true knowledge of the individual self as being immortal and of the 'stuff' of *Brahman*.³⁷

However, it is interesting and most important that it is in verse 4.3, that *bhaj*, the root of the word *bhakti*, and in 4.1 the concept of God's love to a '*bhakto*' (loyal friend with *bhakti*) are introduced for the first time in the *Gita*. It is also noteworthy that both *bhakto* and *bhakti* come from the lips of Krishna Himself to His human friend Arjuna to reveal the highest mystery, that God can love a human being as a friend. Friendship between God and human beings is a mystery vastly unknown before the time of the *Gita*. Although the epic *Mahabharata* contains this mystery, as the container of *the Gita*, this mystery of love is not explained as well as it is in the *Gita*. Perhaps, since the didactic dialogues of Krishna about *bhakti* and theism had been dropped in the *anuGita*, Vyasa had to bring them back more emphatically in the *Gita*. Anyhow, just as Arjuna's *bhakti* develops in stages as he gradually becomes conscious after the great vision (Chapter 11), and realizes that his friend Krishna is more than mere man, *bhakti* too develops centuries after the *Gita*, as the four *margas* of Saivism in the south.^{38, 39}

Although, according to Zaehner, verses 4. 9-11 sum up the whole teaching of the *Gita*;⁴⁰ yet, because of its vagueness, verse 4.11 that Krishna would return the love of any

³⁷ R. C. Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 243.

³⁸ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 77. The four types of God-Human relationships: as knowledge, friendship, sonship and servanthood, the last being the lowest kind. Knowledge comes to the privileges from study of science, art and the *Vedic-Upanishadic* texts; friendship comes by control of the senses, breaths and the mind and also knowledge of gods; sonship comes with worshipping God with flower, water, prayer, song and worship; servanthood comes by service to saints and attending to temple needs. In this passage, Arjuna, a Kshatriya can only be a friend- the second grade relationship.

³⁹ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 181, n: the semantics of *bhaj* and *bhakti*.

⁴⁰ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 185-86, n; 175 n. The whole teaching of the *Gita* is summed up in 4. 9-11.

bhakta who worships Him in whatever way has been the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verse in all of the *Gita*. This passage has been interpreted to mean that polytheism is acceptable to Krishna; “whatever their occupation” is made to mean that Krishna condones social and occupational vertical-hierarchy of *varnashrama dharma*. Its vagueness regarding whom to worship and how to worship gives people unlimited freedom without the guidance to use the freedom to make wise decisions: whether to worship One God or many Gods or which of the many gods; and how polytheism, the caste system, occupational vertical-hierarchy, and conditional love of God are all permissible only to those *bhaktas* who would willingly conform to God’s will and follow in His foot-steps. How does someone follow in His footsteps if that man or woman worships another God? Does Krishna not care about their subjection to social injustices? What is the necessity for the One Absolute God to be so restrained? The way this verse offers positives and negatives on the same platter, makes one wonder if it is an interpolation by some pundit of another faith to disrupt the strength of monotheism, which is new at this time of the *Gita*, and to mislead individuals away from God.

As the table above shows (p.20), the word *bhakti* is not mentioned even once in chapter 5. Zaehner says that if *bhakti*, and *personal God* should be absent, this chapter is a *Brahmavadin’s* (who reveres *Brahman*) interpolation.⁴¹ Zaehner is right in thinking so because the chapter is about *sannyasa yogam* or detachment from the world, an Advaitin concept, contrary to *bhakti*, which is to live in the world and yet not be of the world. The *Gita* explains detachment in the first six chapters and reverses and overrides it progressively with attachment in the next six chapters.

⁴¹ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 77.

Nor does *bhakti* occur in chapter 6 as it deals with *dhyana yogam* (spiritual meditation, which is an elaboration of chapter 5) except in two important verses on *bhakti* at the end of chapter six (6.31; 47), both of which are about the ‘athlete of the spirit,’ who loves and honours God. The final verse of chapter six (47) links the integrated athlete with the God of chapter seven, which inaugurates the entire theistic midsection of the *Gita* (chapters 7-12). Verses 31 and 47 are clarified in detail below.

Zaehner calls 6.31 the climax of the chapter, where Krishna defines athlete of the spirit as the fully integrated man of faith, who, already fully liberated and purified in *Nirvana*, should approach God, Krishna Himself, with love-and-honour (*bhakti*), in order to have fellowship with Him and abide in Him forever (salvation).⁴² This verse speaks about the inmost self (*antaratma*), meaning the deepest part of the heart, mind, body, and soul. God will indwell that human being (temple) which is filled with love of God (*bhakti*). Knowledge of the true self-in-itself precedes knowledge of the Self, the Lord.⁴³ This is the point of departure from the Buddhist ideal of *Nirvana* and Brahmanism that is *Nirvana* too to the Personal God.⁴⁴

We can describe the middle portion of the *Gita* (chapters 7-12) as the highest concentration of *bhakti* verses: 30 out of a total of 48 *bhakti* verses — contained chiefly in chapters 7, 9 and 12. This portion is decidedly theistic; it gives the attributes of God, identifies Krishna as God, and reveals Him in his majesty. Here, He is not no longer the object of meditation (*yoga*) as in the first six chapters, but rather the object of love and

⁴² Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 234 n, 237 n. The exact nuance of the word *bhaj* is too early in our present context. It seems to be participation in and abiding in God here.

⁴³ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 237- 38 n; 242 n. “Lord” is the highest title for Krishna in the *Gita*.

⁴⁴ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 242 n.

surrender (*bhakti*). Here, the integrated *yogin* ‘participates’ with God, but not assimilated into God.

Chapter 7, which is chiefly about the *yoga* of wisdom and experience, the two natures of God, discusses four kinds of worshippers (*bhaktas*), their objects of worship by faith and instinct - gods, ghosts, ancestors and Krishna, - and their final destinations (7.20-23): those who worship other gods would receive finite rewards and rebirths from their divinities while those who ‘love-and-worship Krishna *alone*’ would attain permanent *moksha*. ‘Undivided love to One God’ is celebrated as ‘*ananya-bhakti*’ (*an+anya* is *ananya*, which means ‘no other’) or strict monotheism. Although *ananya-bhakti* is demanded by Krishna, who claims Himself to be higher than the imperishable-Supreme-Brahman (*akshara-param-Brahman* 8.3) and other objects of worship, monotheism is neither insisted upon by the *Gita* nor developed by Hinduism to this day – I wonder why.

The eighth chapter begins with the question, who is That *Brahman*, defines the undefinable in different ways, *aksharam* (*imperishable*), *paramam* (*highest*), *adhiyatmam* (*primeval*), *avyaktam* (*unmanifest*) etc (8.3, 18) and gives the *yogic* theory that the immortal essence of the Self could be realized independently of God. Surprisingly, it has four significant verses that dependence on the all-pervading, primeval, exalted, personal God Krishna alone, who is the unmanifest beyond the unmanifest imperishable Brahman (8.20, 21), one can have subsistence and imperishable final goal (8. 10, 21- 22) through *bhakti*. Thus the *Gita* promises that any dying person who bears Krishna in mind would be led to God. Although strength of mind and integrated *yogic* exercise are good too, they cannot, independently, lead to God without *bhakti*, which is itself an integrating force. Here too the *Gita* advocates for God, pointing one to that God who is greater than the

greatest imperishable *Brahman* (8. 3, 21), who can be ‘easily gained’ by simple *ananya-bhakti* or ‘love-and-worship’ that are directed to ‘none-other’ (8.22).

Although Chapter 9 is traditionally called the *Yoga* of Royal Knowledge and Royal Mystery, in fact, having the highest number of verses (ten) on *bhakti*, it is predominantly of love and devotion.⁴⁵ Krishna re-iterates what He has already stated in chapter 7; but whereas in 7.20-23 He said that He actually strengthened the faith of the worshippers of other gods, though their goals remained finite, here in 9.20-25 He goes a further step and states that all worship is really directed to Himself, even if the worshipper may not realize it. He brings new attainments and possession promised to those who ‘meditate on Him, no other,’ who honor Him by continual meditation (9.22). He repeats in 7. 23, that while the devotees of the gods go to their gods according to their Nature,⁴⁶ all those who worship Him shall come to Him and be with God forever (9.25). God accepts any offering willingly, be it a leaf or flower or fruit or water that a zealous soul gives with love’s devotion (9. 26). He wants all action, all food, sacrifice, alms or penance to be offered up to Him (9. 27). Superseding the *Vedic* sacrifice and Upanishadic good works (BU IV. 4-5), the *Gita* teaches disinterested action as sacrifice and duty (3.9; 17.11). Thus one’s action could be sacrifice and duty to God: means and end (9.27).⁴⁷

Krishna, however, is impartial to all, as is *Brahman*, and He is indifferent to dualities in the same way as the perfected athlete is; but in reciprocating *bhakti*, (loving devotion and communion with the divine) and subsisting in the beloved, He transcends the ‘fixed, still state of *Brahman*.’ We are presented with a philosophical puzzle, viz., whether all

⁴⁵ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 273.

⁴⁶ The *sattvikas* sacrifice to gods, the *rajasas* to sprites and monsters, and the *tamasas* to the dead, each according to their dominant constituent of Nature: 17.4.

⁴⁷ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 283, n.

contingent beings subsist in God or whether *bhakti* opens up a new dimension of love, by which God abides in His lovers, and they in Him, in disinterested love as in Agape. There can be no 'isolation' of the eternal element in the human as in the *Sankhya* system, or of the 'fixed still state of *Brahman*,' but instead, the *bhakta* has a complete and personal indwelling of God, who can only be experienced by the human being who has already achieved liberation (9. 29).⁴⁸

However evil a person's occupation may be, [such as hunting or robbery], if he worships Krishna with love and serves no other, he shall be transformed, changed by God's love, or reckoned as good, for his resolve to change is right⁴⁹. Here too loyalty to One God is insisted upon (9.30). The promise that no one who 'exists in Me' (*Bhavati*, becomes) with loyalty-and-love shall be lost (9. 31) is unlike the *Vedic* religious *dharma* that was not open to the base-born: women, artisans and serfs. The *Bhakti* religion promises acceptance and blessings to all irrespective of caste, occupation, or gender even as Buddhism does.

However, verse 9.32 is a problem: It is not very gracious of the Lord to label the low castes that He had created, as base-born or born of sinful women; it is derogatory language similar to 5.18 where *Brahmans*, cow, elephant, dog and dog-eater (outcaste) are equal in the sight of the wise. If all these people were equal, why were they not told to intermarry, and why did they have to continue to do their own caste duties? Why did the Lord not forbid castes at this stage? Instead, He says that it was He who had created castes (4.13). This contradiction makes some commentators to suspect that these three verses (4.13; 5.18; 9.32) may be interpolations by the uppermost caste - at a much later

⁴⁸ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 285, n.

⁴⁹ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 285, n: Zaehner refers to Mary Magdalene's conversion by Christ.

date, some centuries after Vyasa had written the *Gita*, for he could not have written this with his egalitarian pen.

There is an interesting argument in 9.33, where Krishna turns the tables on the so-called high-caste Brahmanists and invites them too to worship Him: Krishna now addresses the ‘pure and good’ *Brahmins* who ‘practice’ rituals faultlessly, and the princely sages who have the ‘theoretical knowledge’ of devoted love, and suggests to them both to combine their theory and practice into the praxis of *bhakti*. He asks them that if these evil castes and women whom they consider to be lower could so easily tread the highest path of *bhakti* and attain salvation (9.30, 32), would it not be easier for the *Brahmin* and the *Kshatrya* too to commune with Him in love, as they too are born in the same impermanent, joyless world with these vulgar people (9. 33)? But the logical question would be to ask why Krishna did not tell the wise to treat all people equally, not to perpetuate the existence such evil castes.

The next verse (9.34) is a most important verse in which Krishna invites the most integrated-athlete-become-*Brahman* to come to God, in this life, by knowing, loving and worshipping Him. Integration is essential for the ‘highest form of *bhakti*’ (*para-bhakti*), and one need not postpone bliss to the afterlife. Since I am the Self of all beings and the highest way, come to Me with all your works, your sacrifice, your whole heart, mind, will and efforts; you will surely reach Me. On this single verse, Zaehner writes four pages (286-90) of explication.⁵⁰

Traditionally and appropriately, Chapter 10 is called the chapter of the “Far-Flung Power and Glory” or the *Vibhuti* of God. Here Krishna is a Guru to Arjuna teaching him

⁵⁰ Jesus’ greatest Commandment was ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself’ (Mark 12. 29).

all about Himself. Chapter 10 is the script while chapter 11 is the drama. Verse 10.10 combines both integration and *bhakti* as described earlier in 9.34. Integration is communing fully with God in love, for the goal, now, is God Himself beyond the fixed still state of *Brahman* which is Nirvana too (2.39-40; 49-72); this emphasis on God and *bhakti* will recur in 18.51-54. So our athlete must move outward towards God. This outward step is necessary because neither *Brahman* nor the state of 'Brahman-become' (*brahma-bhuta*) is final (18. 54), although *Brahman* manifests itself in the outside world of phenomena and in the still center of the liberated self (14. 27): however, the 'Personal God' is the ground (base) of the immortal changeless *Brahman* (2.16; 14.27).⁵¹ This new metaphysical proposition of a great reversal of status between *Brahman* and Krishna is briefly reviewed here.

There is a growing assertion of the superiority of the personal God over the impersonal *Brahman* in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In the beginning, only *Brahman* is shown as the sacrifice (4.24) but later it reveals God alone as the recipient and Lord of the sacrifice (9.24; 5.29); *Brahman* is the fixed still state which is the natural habitat of the liberated self, it is also material Nature, and the individual spiritual monads or selves of the Sankhya system; *Brahman* is the whole kingdom of time and eternity of which God alone is the king. Krishna is in no great hurry to reveal Himself as the God of Gods until the cosmic vision in 11.13. Even in 13.12-17, the 'highest *Brahman* seems to be identical with Krishna Himself, or at least as His body; the fixed still state of *Brahman*, the *Nirvana* that is *Brahman* too (2.72).

But, rather suddenly, there is radical reversal in the metaphysical status of the two entities, *Brahman* and Krishna. The paradigmatic change is clearly seen when Krishna

⁵¹ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 397, n.

announces that it is He, the personal God, who plants His seed in *Brahman* who is His womb (14.3); hence God is the base supporting *Brahman* and therefore the whole world as He is also the base of the eternal law of righteousness and absolute beatitude (13.27). Whereas *Brahman* is established in the hearts of all (15.15), now, it is the personal God, who is in the hearts of all (14. 27; 18.61; 16.18). Although right from the beginning and all the way through the *Gita*, Krishna is shown to be better and higher than *Brahman*, Krishna reveals the Truth about Himself and His exclusive claims above *Brahman* only in the end that He, the personal God alone could stand independently of, and higher than, the imperishable, unmanifest *Brahman* (14. 18), as He is the *Uttamah purusha*, the sublime sustainer of the three worlds; no other should be worshipped except Krishna Himself, as there is no other way to salvation than Krishna. Thus, finally, the highest *Brahman* of the *Upanishads* is transcended by the personal God, Krishna, who claims all titles of superiority to Himself (15. 15-17) as the superman who will give salvation to the *bhakta* who understands the mysterious doctrine He, Krishna has revealed (15. 20).

This shining lamp of God's-wisdom (10.11) is kept burning like a flickerless flame in a windless place (6.19): it is God's grace that enlightens the total personality, and it is the same grace that keeps it unflickering.⁵² This verse (10.11) speaks of the grace of God, that dispels ignorance with God's lamp-of-wisdom (*jnana-dipa*), not the love of God or human *bhakti*.⁵³ Two *Sanskrit* words, *anukampa* (10.11) and *prasada* (18.62; 73) are used for "grace" in only these three verses of the *Gita* for God's grace given to the integrated *bhaktas*. Although integration is a pre-condition for communion with God, it is God

⁵² Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 294-95. By grace alone: 294.

⁵³ The Title page of this essay bears the Title in the form of a Lamp of Wisdom that burns by the oil of God's grace with the wick of *bhakti* (6.19, 10.11). 'The word of God is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' (Psalm 119: 105); Christ said that he is the light of the world (Matthew 9: 12).

alone who gives integration to the *buddhi-yogis* through their *bhakti*: thus *buddhi* and *bhakti* are tightly spun together. Grace is a new concept in the *Gita*, almost non-existent in the *Upanishads*, as we saw earlier.

To be ‘*Brahman* still’ (2. 72: *Brahma-sthitih* or *Brahma-Nirvana*) is a state of *bhakti*, but at a lower level, which comes by a long and tedious process of obtaining knowledge which helps toward the winning of liberation. This process is allowed, and made possible, for only a few of the privileged class. The individual who has become *Brahman* (*ayam brahman asmi*) has still to reach the highest level that perfects liberation itself by drawing close to the personal God and possessing Him in His fullness by knowing Him as He is ((9.26-28; 18. 55).

How does this liberation happen? Pleasantly and surprisingly, it is reached easily and forthwith by *ananya bhakti*, i.e., the love and loyalty to God alone. So our athlete of the Spirit must once again move forward and draw nigh to God. The game-changes that take place in moving forward from *Brahman*-to-God and *moksha*-by-grace are presented in 18. 51-54; 55-56. Saivism, Vaishnavism and Christianity emphasize our human need of God’s grace even to hold on to Him by *bhakti*, for our best human hold is feeble.⁵⁴

Now we come to chapter eleven in search of *bhakti* which is given a separate division (2.ii) in this thesis in order to emphasize its centrality for the *Gita*. It is central because, it is essentially the spiritual climax of the *Gita*, where two monumental revelations take place in the cosmic vision of God’s awesome, terrifying majesty, the *Visvarupa*, the *mysterium tremendum*: Revelation of Krishna Himself as the Supreme God, and

⁵⁴ Chit Bhavananda, *The BhagavadGita: translation and Commentary*, (535). The *jnana-dipa* (‘light of wisdom’ of God removes the darkness of ignorance by ‘grace alone,’ not even by *bhakti* or human wisdom. With God’s light, man sees God in his heart. This is in line with the Christian thought on the grace of God.

revelation of *bhakti-marga* as the only path (11.53) which will lead His *bhaktas* to intimacy with Him (11.54) and to their final salvation. (11.55). The God of the actual vision is prefigured in the chapter before (10), whose tempo is built up in crescendo towards the vision of chapter eleven, and the flood-gates of the vision are turned into the following chapter (12), the whole of which is about *Isvara-bhakti* and the *bhakta*.

The purport of this vision is to introduce Krishna in his human *avatar* as the Supreme God, even above the supreme *Brahman*. Thus theism enters into existence in chapter 11 of the *Gita* with powerful fanfare. If people want to see God as He really is, is there a way to achieve such a vision? Can others have such a direct divine revelation of God as Arjuna had? Yes, what is unavailable to gods, is available to humans, but not by *Vedic* sacrifices, ascetic practices or works such as giving alms (12.53); instead, it can be availed only by worship of love (*bhakti*) addressed to the personal God, Krishna alone, none other; for, love of God excludes all other loves. So once again, Krishna wants *ananya-bhakti* (11.54), i.e., monotheism and loving worship of one God, Krishna Himself. Even better, these *bhaktas* have special privileges: they can enter into Him, which indicates a more personal intimacy, known as *sayujya* (the highest form of loving relationship between God and the *bhakta*).⁵⁵

Chapter eleven of the great vision (*visvarupa*) closes with a 'chiasmic' (double-opposite-injunction): 'be attached to Me in loyal-love,' and 'be cut off from all other attachments.' The *Gita* advises 'to be totally attached to God and totally detached from all worldly attachments, which is an important step in one's spiritual growth. The total detachment of the self from the world in the first six chapters of the *Gita* is reversed and

⁵⁵ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 320, n. Loving intimacy with God is pure love, somewhat comparable to what we read in the Song of Songs of Solomon in the Bible.

filled by a total attachment to God in the next six chapters. Attachment of the mind with God comes forcefully in 7.1 at the opening of the second section, and is elevated to a fearful climax in chapter 11 and idyllic peaceful love at the very end of the *Gita* (! 8.64-65), as the most mysterious doctrine of love.

Chapter 12, traditionally and appropriately called the *yoga* of loving devotion, evaluates the three *yogas*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *karma*, and elevates *bhakti* above both *jnana* and *karma*, but without rejecting either of them.

Exclusive devotion to God is increasingly insisted upon in the latter half of the *Gita* as it is here in chapter 12: (8. 14, 22: 9. 13, 22, 30: 11. 54: 13. 10-11), despite positively encouraging worship of other gods. “Whatever form, whatever god, a devotee with faith desires to honor, that very faith do I confirm in him making it unswerving and secure” because the worshipper attains union with what is worshipped (7. 21); and doing so he really worships Him; He reveals (9. 23), however, the end cannot be Krishna, if the means is not towards Him.

Chapter 12 is entirely dedicated to the news (God and *bhakti*) announced in chapter 11. Its very first verse is a comparison between those who love Krishna and those who revere *Brahman*, where a clear statement is made by Krishna [answering Arjuna] that His own *bhaktas* are more experienced athletes of the spirit than those who ‘revere’ the Imperishable, Unmanifest *Brahman* because He gives his devotees the integration of the self (*buddhi yoga*), by which they may draw nigh to Him (10.10). The God-given integration of the self makes room for love of God, which draws the self out of its ‘fixed still state’ into an emotional relation with the transcendent God, ‘the other Self’⁵⁶. After

⁵⁶ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 322, n.

all, was it not by the grace of Krishna that Arjuna had the great vision in answer to his prayer to see God's glory? In other words, even the wisdom that is necessary to make the right decision to love God comes from God, by His grace, which is an essential teaching of Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Christian theology. Only God can give the highest *bhakti*, the 'lamp of wisdom,' which dispels the remaining darkness of ignorance of those athletes too, who revere *Brahman* that they too reach God's home (10.11). *Bhakti* (devotional love of God) is an indispensable pre-requisite to *moksha*.⁵⁷

Krishna insists that He would be honoured if *dhyana-yoga* (*yoga* of meditation) and *abhyasa-yoga* (of spiritual exercise) controlling the mind leave no room for other gods and other goals than Himself alone (12.6); this is another instance where the *Gita* calls attention to *ananya-bhakti*-monotheism. Those whose thoughts are fixed on Me alone will be lifted out of the ocean of *samsara* to enter Me, their home, *moksha* (12. 7-8).

Bhakti yoga is the best road to God. Verses 8-12 of chapter 12 show how *bhakti yoga* (emotional stirring up of the soul), is the best, easiest, and the most direct way to find one's home in God (12.8). All the other yogas, *jnana* (learning the scriptures), *dhyana* (concentrated meditation) and *sannyasa* (renunciation) are harder to perform than *bhakti*. *Karma yoga* (performance of works) such as giving of alms, building of temple, etc. manual services at the temple - such as cleaning - or even renouncing the fruit of one's works is harder to perform and is lower in value than any of the above yogas. Besides, even the most perfectly performed *yoga* of any kind is incomplete if it is not complemented by *bhakti* (12.8-12).

⁵⁷ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 326, n; 295, n. Love of God comes by wisdom of God, and the wise love God. God in the self might be called 'the highest wisdom' corresponding to the 'highest love-and-loyalty' to God mentioned in 18. 54.

Krishna's 'song of love' (12.14-20) shows his exuberant, inestimable love for His loving devotee who loves Him well in specific ways. The phrase, "my beloved man" occurs six times in seven verses (12.14-20): 'my loving devotee' is my 'beloved;' the liberated man is my 'beloved;' my 'devotee' who gives up...is 'my beloved;' I 'love' the man who hates not nor exults; the man who is 'loyal-devoted-and devout;' 'devotee' who gives up the fruit of his work; 'my beloved;' I 'love' the 'man-who-loves-Me'...he is 'my beloved.' As well, these same verses are replete with words related to *bhakti too*: 'loyal,' 'devoted' and 'devout;' The chapter ends by saying that He loves exceedingly those loving-devotees who reverence and believe the deathless words of righteousness He has spoken just now, and make Him their goal —(12.20). *Bhakti* needs the trust that God is able to do what He promises to do, and faith in God that fuels that trust. Love as "inter-penetration" of the hearts of God and the *bhakta* is sacred, not profane. Zaehner interprets the above as "I love the man" in the active voice, while Chit Bhavananda interprets "*sa me priya*" in the passive voice as "he is my beloved."⁵⁸

Having climbed the lower peaks in chapters 7, 9 and 12, we are ready to climb to the highest peak of love situated in the last chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (18). As chapters 13-17 treat miscellaneous topics, such as the three constituents, the three kinds of yogas, the three kinds of faith, etc, but in 13.18 and 15.19 the *Gita* guarantees Krishna's own mode of being (salvation) to the man who loves-and-worships Him.

In this context, one can picture Krishna as sitting in His Himalayan seat as a *guru* (teacher) with His banner of love flying over Him, and his song of love floating around

⁵⁸ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 329-331. Chit Bhavananda, *The BhagavadGita*, 657-68. The Bible speaks of God's love in the active voice, e.g., "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31. 3); "you love each other as I have loved you" (John 13. 34). Stephen Neill also remarks about this difference in the *BhagavadGita*.

Him in the cool air, with young Arjuna, the graduating student sitting slightly lower, in the Upanishadic fashion, receiving his final mysterious secret *mantra* or *maha-vakya* (great word) before going into the world. The *Gita*'s final chapter (18) contains the essential secret of the *Gita*, the *Gita-Rahasya* "I love you dearly" (*ishto'si me drdham*: 18.64). This most mysterious doctrine of Salvation encapsulates two concepts, *bhakti* and *prasada* (love and grace): the human being's love for God through *bhakti*, and God's reciprocating love for the human being by *prasada* (grace).

However, the *Gita* also stipulates who must not be taught the loving message of the *Gita*, as well as those who alone should be. Krishna commands that this secret word must never be told to those who are not austere, have no love-and-loyalty for Him, who refuse to obey Him, or envy Him (18. 67). But, indeed, whoever shall proclaim this highest mystery to His loving devotees showing all the while the highest love-and-loyalty to Him will surely come to Him (18. 68), and no one on earth can render Him more pleasing service or be more beloved to Him than these (18. 69). Protecting the good and destroying the evil-doers is seen earlier too, in the famous verses (4.7-8), where Krishna says,

Whenever the law of unrighteousness withers away and lawlessness arises, then do I generate Myself [on Earth]. (4.7)

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for setting up of the law of righteousness I come into being age after age. (4.8).

As Arjuna comes out of his doubts by God's grace [he is converted], and is ready to obey Krishna's command to tell all *bhaktas* about God's love,' he is thrilled with joy.

Thus the Krishna-Arjuna-dialogue closes with a high note of grace (18.73) and its epilogue ends in the traditional way with thrills of joy and blessings. (18.76-78).⁵⁹

Having established the hypothesis that *bhakti* is the essence of the *Gita*, by its own verses, we will now go to the climax of *bhakti* as visualized in the vision in chapter 11.

⁵⁹ The word “grace” occurs only three times in the *Gita*; and every time it is used as God’s grace to the *bhakta*, whereas the word “*bhakti*” or related words occur about 40 times as from the *bhakta* to God.

2. 2. CHAPTER ELEVEN OF THE GITA THE CLIMAX OF THE GITA: THE DIVINE VISION ⁶⁰

R. C. Zaehner⁶¹ calls chapter 11 of the *BhagavadGita*, “The cosmic vision of Arjuna”, while Acharya Vinoba Bhave calls it the “Cosmic Awareness,” where one experiences the whole creation in a tiny grain of sand; Chit Bhavananda calls it Krishna’s “*Yoga of the Cosmic Vision*,”⁶² and Radhakrishnan names it the “Lord’s Transfiguration.” It is a theophany where God speaks to man face to face.

The author of the *Gita*, whether Vyasa or Bhadarayana opens the chapter with the words ‘supreme mystery,’ (*paramam guhyam-sanjnitam*) which provokes the reader to ask, “What is the mystery?” That mystery concerns His infinite glory and power (*vibhuti-yoga*), which is actually veiled in chapter 10 in the verbal description given by Krishna to Arjuna.⁶³ That same secret knowledge will be unveiled now to Arjuna in the ‘Cosmic Awareness’ (*samagrata yoga*) in chapter 11. In other words, just as Arjuna will be able to “learn how to recognize the Great Brahma-Deva (Krishna) who pervades the countless small objects in the universe, so also will the readers learn to see God first in the gross elements and then in the subtle ones, first in the simple, then in the complex”. ⁶⁴

⁶⁰ 2.2: I wrote this Essay on Chapter Eleven as an assignment for the Graduate Degree Philosophy Program.

⁶¹ Zaehner, *The BhagavadGita: With a Detailed Commentary From Original Sources*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 303-320.

⁶² Chit Bhavananda, *Srimad BhagavadGita: Text in Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil and Detailed Commentary in Tamil* (Trichy: Tapovanam Press, 1966), 580-642. “*Yoga*” means union, yoking or discipline. Here the *yoga* displays God’s one vast form which encloses everything in the universe.

⁶³ Psalm 19. 1: The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

⁶⁴ Vinoba Bhave, *Talks On the Gita* (Madras: Thompson & Co, 1958), 148.

Radhakrishnan sees this as the immanence and the transcendence of God.⁶⁵ Zaehner interprets the context as Arjuna not being contented with the marvelous verbal account of the Self, now asks to let him literally see the form of the divine glory (*rupam-aisvaram*), the eternal genuine Isvara-Self with his own eyes. This sounds like Thomas, a disciple of Jesus, who said that he would not accept the verbal report of the other disciples of having seen the resurrected Jesus unless he himself could actually see, and touch, Jesus.⁶⁶

It is normal, for Arjuna, to desire to see the majesty of the supreme form of the supreme source of everything (11. 2- 3). But because of the material film ('net') caused by the attractions of the senses obscuring his human wisdom, he cannot see God with his natural *prakriti* eyes.⁶⁷ So Krishna has to provide him with divine eyes (*divyam-caksuh*) to see Him. Given divine eyes, Arjuna can now see Him as Space and Time in the awesome display of Krishna's Universal Form (*visvarupa-darsana*): the space of the universe is His body; He is Himself Time (*Kalan*), past, present and future, in which Arjuna is but the occasion; He is also *Kalagni* (Doomsday-fire). He sees the soldiers on the battlefield already destroyed like moths in a flame, even before the war has started.

But what is the real mystery that Krishna had promised to reveal? The mystery is the identity of God: Krishna, his erstwhile human playmate and friend, Krishna, his charioteer now - is God. Hearing this mystery, Arjuna is stunned, surprised, astonished,

⁶⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, *The BhagavadGita* (London: George Allen &Unwin Ltd, 1957, 1989), 256.

⁶⁶ John 20: 25: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, I will not believe." But when Jesus appeared when Thomas was with the other apostles, and was invited to touch his wounds, even without touching him he believed, and cried out, "My Lord, and my God!"

⁶⁷ Swami Nikilananda, *The Upanishads* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 137: Svetasvatara 5, 3: The non-Self, or physical element, consisting of body, mind senses, and prana is called a 'net' because it entraps the soul and entangles it in the world; and Zaehner comments, "God's creative activity (*maya*) is seen as a 'veil' between the individual self and the divine essence" (7. 12-14, p. 16).

amazed and flabbergasted beyond words and out of his wits. It is then he asks, "Who are you? (11.31) The answer is "I AM Kalan."⁶⁸ The microcosm that is sitting with him in the chariot is the macrocosm, God. The *Gita* is singling out Krishna as God and elevating him as the primeval God of gods (*deva-ati-deva*), the One among the many: a monumental change of paradigm in the religious history of India from this time.⁶⁹

The many mouths of *Isvara* swallowed the soteriologies of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, orthodox philosophies such as Sankhya, *Yoga*, and of the heterodox ones such as Buddhism, and also Monism, Advaita and others. As they converged into the mouths, some of the trends were pulverized, synthesized and harmonized intellectually and rationally into a personalized monism of the *Gita*; while some akin to Advaita were rejected and superseded, others such as Vaishnavism were assimilated. Christian doctrine of salvation by the unconditioned grace of God also can be seen within the '*Gita-yogam*': if the *Gita* is dated around the beginning of the Christian era, it would be possible for the doctrines of the Christian teaching to have infiltrated into India. It is noteworthy that 'Grace' (*kripa*), a vital word in the *Gita*, never found in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, is used for the first time.⁷⁰

The *Gita*, thus being a selectively inclusive philosophy, it has no problem in using terminology and concepts of these other faiths and philosophies that people were already

⁶⁸ Name of God is important to the devotee. In his "Burning Bush Vision" Moses asks the same question, "Who are you?" and the answer is "I Am That I am." Jesus said I am the light of the world, I am the good shepherd, I am the Truth, Resurrection and Life etc.

⁶⁹ 'Mystery of God' is seen in the Bible too: Colossians 1: 26-27; 2: 2 "...in order that they [the Gentiles] may know the mystery of God, namely, Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

⁷⁰ Only in the very last verse (6. 23) of the *Svetasvatara* the word '*kripa*' (for '*bhakti*') appears for the first time in the whole of the *Upanishads*; even here it occurs in the devotional sense. "*Guru-kripa-vihaya brahma-vidya durlabhati*" i.e., 'without the Guru's 'grace,' knowledge of the Absolute is rarely possible.

familiar with at its time, as they were, or changing the meanings or giving them new meanings and uses. *Brahman*, *Atman*, Self, *prakriti* and *purusha* are a few examples. So Krishna is called *Purushothaman* (the ideal, perfect man). “As part of a different tradition, it had no difficulty to draw on a far larger reality of beliefs and practices than the *Upanishads* which remain tied to the *Vedic* tradition of sacerdotalism.”⁷¹ This is an example of Hinduism’s claim of toleration of other religions, which is its ability to take in, absorb and assimilate them until they, like rivers running into the ocean, lose their individual identities and become inseparably one with it. Buddhism is said to be one such faith that was absorbed into it with a friendly embrace.

Zaehner calls this chapter the “climax” of the *Gita*,⁷² one of the great mystical passages of world literature. It captures the majesty as well as the awesome power of the Cosmic Reality as much as can be communicated by words, or like music to the ear. The poetry is comparable to some of the Vaishnava or Saiva religious love songs and to the poetry of the Song of Solomon. It conveys its purpose by means of a vision and a vivid dialogue between the divine and the human personalities. But there is more here than poetic fancy, the nature of God in the person of Krishna. It is similar to what Rudolf Otto calls, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a tremendous terrifying mystery, which is not fascinating or charming⁷³ until the enchanting grace returns in the human form of his friend Krishna. Eliot Deutsch would call it “a discourse from one warrior to another, even

⁷¹ Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi (Ed), *The Essential Vedanta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedanta* (Indiana, USA: 2004, World Wisdom), 60.

⁷² Zaehner, *The BhagavadGita*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 303.

⁷³ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 1-5, 97. Otto coins the word “numinous” for the ineffable religious experience, which is beyond human rationality: there is a creaturely terror and also a joy in the presence of the Holy. Arjuna, who experiences terror viewing the cosmic vision experiences joy when Krishna changes from the Vishnu-Narayana with four hands and thousand mouths to the dark skinned friend with two hands. In the 18th chapter Krishna is not terrifying but charming, so the *bhakta* is joyful in the presence of the gracious God.

if one of them would be discovered to be God himself.”⁷⁴ The Holy God is terrifying but the other side of his image is ineffable love and measureless grace.

Chapter eleven is of the greatest importance to the *Gita* because it discloses its greatest mystery, (*Gita rahasya* in 11.1) through a terrifying vision of God, with a charming verbal display of God’s power and majesty by His ‘gracious favor’ (*anugrahaya paramam*) in chapter ten. The author has an ingenious, poetic, attractive way of doing his tremendous job, and the *Sanskrit* language lends him the precise words and colourful phrases to describe ‘eyes’ and ‘vision’: ‘lotus-petal-eyed Krishna’ (*‘kamala-pattra-aksha’*, in 11.2), ‘divine eyes’ (*divyam caksus* in 11. 8), ‘see’ (*drashtam*, in 11. 3, 4, 7 and 8), or ‘behold’ (*pasya*, in 11. 5, 6, 7, 8), and he repeats these words in a kaleidoscopic manner. Of all these words, the one most pertaining to this essay is, ‘behold’ (*‘pasya’*) that gives us the clue to what Krishna was inviting Arjuna to behold.

The word ‘behold’ (*pasya*) is used in the four verses 5, 6, 7, and 8, where Krishna tells Arjuna each time to behold something different. First, in verse 5, it is to ‘behold’ His million (infinite) splendid forms; secondly, in verse 6, to ‘behold’ the superior beings such as gods and *rishis* in relationship with Krishna; thirdly, in verse 7, to ‘behold’ the ‘whole universe of multiple’ mouths and eyes (*aneka-vaktra-nayanam*) united in His ‘One body’, and, finally, in verse 8, to behold His Lordly *Yoga*. So let us behold too the four important aspects of Arjuna’s ‘experience’ of the immense Transfiguration.⁷⁵ Som P. Ranchan also divides this chapter into the same four units.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Deutsch and Dalvi (Ed), *The Essential Vedanta*, 60.

⁷⁵ Robert N. Minor et al., Compiler, Arvind Sharma *New Essays in the BhagavadGita: Philosophical, Methodological and Cultural Approaches*, (New Delhi and University of Sydney, Australia: Books & Books, 1987), 42.

⁷⁶ Som P. Ranchan, *Revisioning Gita*, (New Delhi: Konrak Publishers, 1991), 40: This is an expository and interpretative attempt to elucidating the *Gita*, and also going into the problematic of the *Gita* using psychology, literature and philosophy.

Until verse 31, where Arjuna asks, “who are you?” and Krishna reveals Himself, Arjuna does not know what this vision was meant to do. Pending his recognition in verse 41 that Krishna, the *Yadava* prince and his comrade, is God, he did not know about His majesty; and now he is distraught and begs His forgiveness for playing and jesting with Him as an equal. The next five verses (42-46) are Arjuna’s description of the attributes of God that he ‘beholds’ in Krishna. The vision is useless unless God reveals the meaning.

In this chapter Arjuna testifies that the person he sees in this mystical vision is *rupam isvaram* of the authentic (*sakshath*) exact Vishnu-Krishna himself that he wanted to see, not any other: because it pertains to His own Self (*adhyatmam* 11. 1), His endless Self (*avyayam, tvam atmanam* (11. 1-2) and the *Yogesvara*’s creative power, which is *maya* or *prakriti* (11. 4) that belongs to Vishnu. He saw exactly what he wanted to see. However, later, terrified, he longs to see Krishna’s gentle loving form (*saumya*) again. We saw earlier, in verses 5-8, that Arjuna saw four groups of things in the cosmic vision; now let us see the details of each of the four groups.

The first “Behold” (*pasya*): (6.5; 9-14) In verse 5, Krishna says to Arjuna, “Behold my millions of divine forms in infinite color and shape,” (*sataso-sahasra-sah* is hundreds of thousands), or in effect, infinite forms, and in verses 9 to 14, Sanjaya testifies to Dhridharashtra that the *Maha Yogesvaran*, Hari (Vishnu) has revealed to Arjuna His universal highest sovereign form adorned with his own peculiar vestures. This form was an auspicious sight (*adbhuta darsanam*) that consisted of numberless mouths and eyes, divine garlands, jewels, robes and weapons; there was exquisite fragrance coming out of his anointing; every aspect of it was wonderful (*ascharyam*) in every way; the radiance of Krishna’s Universal Form was brighter than a thousand suns rising together. Just as the

sun, Vishnu's symbol has no comparison, Vishnu also has no comparison, but He is a thousand times superior, and He alone is *Mahatma*. The vision that Arjuna 'beheld' was 'the One single form (body) of God' in which 'the whole wide world of wonderful forms' of multiplicity had converged. At full realization of seeing God, his *kshatriya* senses bursting with amazement, his mind and self steeped in reverence, he showed his creaturely subjectivity by bending his head low and greeting God loudly in ecstasy.

The second *pasya* (11.6) is taken up again in verses 11.15-20: Sanjaya, the narrator, repeats that Arjuna did see the *Visva Rupa* only in general, but not its exact beginning, middle or end, for it was far too big to see its whole. And yet, seeing in it the authentic symbols of Vishnu-Narayana's crown, wheel and club, Arjuna identified in it the imperishable, endless and changeless, primeval Person, the guardian of the eternal (*sanatana*) *dharma*, the foundation, support and home of the entire world ('*jagan-nivasa*'), Vishnu, who is the vast immeasurable space between heaven and earth, the highest Self. The whole *Visva-rupa* is entirely that of the *Gita*, describing the *Saguna Isvara*, the personal (male) God with a million auspicious attributes and containing the entire phenomenal world and gods and all other beings within himself and controlling all of them Himself, alone. Here God, Self and *purusha* are active, powerful and controlling the actions of the *prakriti* – three males controlling one female.⁷⁷

The mystery of the *Gita* is that the highest Reality is both 'a Person' and 'infinite'; the form of this highest Self is all-encompassing and its forms are eternally related to the activity of the world and of each individual self like Arjuna. All relationships in the created world are eternally controlled and sustained by God. This Reality is the non-

⁷⁷ Ramesh Patel, *Metaphysical Vision in Philosophy of the Gita*, American University Studies Series V, Philosophy; vol. 105), p. 118.

attached Lord of all Nature (*purusha*) whose lower Nature is the eightfold *prakriti* and his 'higher Nature' is all *jiva*: when the body and self come together, life begins. Zaehner explains, "Each *jiva* or *jiva-bhuta* is an individual transmigrating self, a particle of the divine substance imprisoned in material nature: *jiva-bhuta-prakriti*" (7. 5); thus every *jiva* contains both, the higher and lower Natures of God within themselves (womb 7.6), and God's seed is placed in that womb; that Brahman is the womb and the personal God is the seed (14.3). Krishna claims to be the 'origin,' the womb, the primeval seed, the material cause, the dissolution or end of the whole universe including all people (7.6).⁷⁸

For the *Gita*, God, though by definition infinite and indivisible, is none the less capable of assuming a finite and separate form [*avatar*]. "Time am I, who causes the destruction of the world" (11. 32), and Time itself, like God, is both finite and divisible from one point of view and infinite and indivisible from another. It is a philosophically insoluble mystery that particles of God descend into matter and adopt the senses and mind with which, so long as they remain in matter, are indissolubly identified.⁷⁹

This Self that Arjuna's vision contained is not the neutral monistic Universal *nirguna* Brahman because it is described as masculine Lord, with forms and features like lotus eyes, four shoulders (*rupa*, *kamala-kan*, *catur-bhuja*). Yet, the neutral *nirgunas*, Universal (*visva* 16) infinite (*sanatana*, 11, 18) and primeval Person (*purusha*, 18) are the vital key descriptions that complete the *sagunas* of this vision that pervades in all directions. It is the two-in-one form: '*nirguna Brahman*' and '*saguna Vishnu-Narayana-Krishnan*;' the latter is second to none, the 'highest Brahman' or even the 'mighty Creator God Brahma' seated on the lotus, as we will see in the next '*pasya*.'

⁷⁸ Zaehner, *The BhagavadGita*, 246, n for *jiva* known as "*jiva-bhuta*."

For the idea of God as the origin of the world refer to 4.6, 7.6, 9.8 14.3.

⁷⁹ Zaehner, *The BhagavadGita*, 364, n: particles of God descending into the *jiva bhuta* or the *avatar*.

The second 'Behold' (*pasya*) (11. 6 and 21- 31) shows that there are other divine beings in relationship to Krishna; but they are all clearly subjected to Him. They come under three separate groups: addressed as Dhritharashtra's sons, their gurus, friends, soldiers, as one group; gods, devas, Rudras, etc. as another group, but He alone is God, the Lord, God of gods (*deva-deva*, 11. 13) and primal God (*ati-deva*). Thirdly, there are ancestors, sages or perfected saints who are trying to cross the stream to attain Nirvana but He alone is their goal. They all, including *Brammah*, the creator seated on his lotus, are 'merely parts of His body', His higher Nature 11. 15), all the worlds and Nature (*prakriti*) being His lower Nature. Krishna (in 11. 54) says that His devotees should have *bhakti*, exclusively for Him 'alone', not for any other (*ananya*) being or god. Thus, by this vision, the author literally and vividly portrays through Arjuna's praises (11. 36-49) Krishna's own words that every other being or god is 'a minute part of His body'

The *Gita* has subordinated all gods and beings to Krishna, and they are all terrified to see his mighty form but are praising him (11. 21); they had prayed to Him for such a vision as this but none had ever been granted thus far.⁸⁰ The flames that lick the sky reminds one of the *Vedic* sacrifices that soar up to the sky to take food for the gods and bring back answers to human prayers for mundane blessings, and also the fire at the end of the Times (*yugas*). Here the *Visva-rupa* of the vision is not gracious or cool; its ghastly teeth crush the vast numbers of creatures that are brought into the myriad mouths and swallow them as one piece. Even the two armies on the battlefield that are all rushing

⁸⁰ Luke 10. 21-23: "No one knows who the Son is...except those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him".... Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"

through this annihilating machine, which, in real life, any way, are mere puppets tied to a machine called Fate (18. 61).

There are a few conflicting issues of God's *dharma* here. When, even with the celestial eyes, Arjuna cannot see the ghastly vision any longer, cries out to end the cosmic vision and show to him the cool blue form and two hands of Krishna, his friend. This is a paradoxical picture of the greatest God's mighty power to destroy any and all who are not His; and in contrast, to all His beloved *bhaktas*, He is their gentle, loving friend (*saumya*), refuge in time of trouble, and final home (*jagan-nivasa* (11. 25). He would crush all their enemies even if they are as invincible as Bhishma, Drona or Karna (for the skull of any who kills these men would burst at the same time), Krishna would kill them on behalf of Arjuna, His dearest friend, for the whole universe is spun at the tip of his finger⁸¹ (11.2, 17; 8. 22; 9.2; 18.46), because He himself is the indestructible (*akshara Brahman* (11.18), and greater than and beyond the indestructible Brahman; therefore He is *tat-param* 'That Greatest' (Sv. U.5.1).

However, Krishna, the guardian of the eternal law, evades response to Arjuna's moral dilemmas: pertaining to killing of kith and kin and respected teachers, and performing *svakarma*, *svadharma* and *Kshatriya-dharma*, all of which hang on *Varna-dharma* or the Caste Law. Krishna, as the author of the four-caste-system (2.42-46), refrains from providing answers to these moral dilemmas or even justifies the customary *ashrama-dharmas* and *dharma-sastras* such as the laws of Manu, which are an integral part of the Hindu society. Krishna instructs Arjuna to stand up, fight and win glory

⁸¹ Zaehner, *The BhagavadGita*, 315, n.

Ashrama-dharma is the observance of certain duties by the three upper caste Aryan men in the four stages of their lives: the bachelor attends traditional schools; the house-holder supports religious acts, gives alms and looks after ageing parents; older men leave home to perform pilgrimages or practice austerity in the forest, and the men of the last stage may undertake optional *sannyasa*

conquering his enemies (11. 33). We are told, for example, that Arjuna is not allowed to do somebody else's duty (*para-dharma*) of the Brahmins as he is not a *Brahmin*; he is not exempt from his own Kshatriya job (*sva-dharma*) on the battlefield. He should not be 'workless' (*a-karma*) or do *para-dharma* for, even a *para-dharma* that is done well (*vi-karma*), is without merit. He has no choice but to do *sva-dharma* (own duty), however devoid of merit it is. His duty is decided permanently by God according to the three natural innate *gunas* he is born with (4.33).

Further, in Krishna's present *avatar*, as in every *avatar* of Vishnu, the purpose being salvation of the *bhaktas* and destruction of the *dhushtas* (evil doers), Krishna makes it clear to Arjuna that Krishna, as the agent, will win the battle, but Arjuna being the occasion, 'a mere puppet tied to the wheel of fate,' he could have the honor and fame of the victory, if he would choose to do God's paramount will to fight the battle as a *Kshatriya*. In spite of all these mandatory laws regarding duties, Krishna insists that Arjuna has the freedom to do his own choice (11. 33; 18.59).

The third 'Behold' (*pasya*) is the invitation to see the whole world (unity of the world) in Krishna's 'body' (11. 7, 32-34). In verse 7, we saw that Arjuna was invited to see the whole world being centered in Krishna, along with all the moving and unmoving things, and whatever else that may be there in His 'body.' His power is over his lower Nature, *prakriti*, as in the classical *Sankhya* and *Yoga* systems, and His higher Nature consists of the individual *atman or purusha or buddhi* of beings, *jiva-bhuta*. Krishna gives a summary of his lower and higher natures. See 7. 4-5 below:

Eightfold divided is My Nature—thus earth, water, fire and air, space, mind (*manas*), and also the soul (*buddhi*), and the ego (*ahamkara*). (7.4)

This is my lower: but other than this, I have a higher nature; this too you must know. [And this is Nature] developed into life by which this world is kept in being. (7.5)

Krishna's lower nature is as 'active' as is *prakriti* in the *Sankhya* system, but with regard to his actions to sustain the world in general and with regard to the working out of the results of the Kurukshetra war, in the context of the *Bhagavad Gita*, He (*purusha*) is himself the agent and Lord. Everything in the world of the '*cara-acara*' (moving and the un-moving) is under His control as the controller or agent of the entire cosmos, including Arjuna and the battle-to-happen and at the end of the *yugas*. The warriors run towards their extinction as rivers into the sea and like moths towards fire (11. 28-29).

Arjuna witnesses all the above things in the actual cosmic Vision (11. 32-34). In addition, *Kala* too is here, for Krishna says, "Time I Am." Krishna claims himself to be *Kala* (Time) and the one who will swallow up *Kala* (*Yama*, god of death) himself in the end of the *yugas* (11. 32). And as *Kala*, of Time and Death, He foretells that, whatever is Arjuna's will [which amounts to naught], Krishna would cause destruction and death of both armies by swallowing up the whole of the *Kshatriya* class (as it happened in His *Parasurama-avatar*. Krishna's prediction, that He will take the two armies through his many mouths and between his elephant tusk-like teeth to their total extermination, shows that He is certain of His own power and of His determination to destroy them completely.

Two things are brought up again: the multiplicity of the individuals contained in the 'body' of the One Krishna, and the reality of the multiplicity of the whole world as a part of Him. This is definitely the real world of multiplicity (*saprapanca*) of Vaishnavism, not the phenomenal, unreal (*maya* world, *nishprapanca*) of Advaita.

In chapter 11 we see the unequivocal claims of Krishna to be the Absolute higher divinity who is higher than the highest Brahman (11. 37), Brammah, the Creator (11. 15),

⁸² and Kalan, the destroyer of lives (11. 32). He would destroy the lives of all the warriors in this battle, whatever Arjuna's decision may be, for it is of no consequence (11. 32); As Krishna is 'all in all' in all the three worlds, and as He is Time, the time is ripe now for Krishna to act. The best and the only thing that Arjuna can do would be to agree intellectually and intuitively to be a 'tool of God' and fight the battle (*saranagati tattvam*), for Krishna repeats, the killing is already ordained (11. 33, 34). If he disagrees with the divine determination; and not take up his sword, he will anyhow be made to do it, and he would feel frustrated that he is a victim of fate. When the *bhakta* is united with the Lord in his actions, the Lord takes the responsibility and final blame for his actions.

Fourth 'Behold' (*pasya*): Krishna says, "Behold (*Pasya*) my power as Lord, my Lordly *Yoga*" (11. 8, 15-31). As you cannot see Me by your own eye, I will give you the divine eyes of *jnana* with which you can behold my *Isvara-yoga*. Here Krishna is going to show to Arjuna that He Himself is the *Yogesvaran*. The whole vision is about Himself, His power and His glory. His *Yoga* is what He is and what He does for the maintenance of order of the universe (3. 22). *Gita-yoga* is that action is done without concern for the result; oneself is unattached to *prakriti*, but attached only and eternally to Krishna and one gives exclusive and loving devotion to Krishna. Essentially, *Gita-yoga* is *bhakti*.

It is worth looking at what psychic movements go on in the beholder of the vision, Arjuna, whether they are normal, physical, spiritual, mystic or occult. Rohit Mehta explains in the following passage about the Transfiguration in chapter 11 of the *Gita*, that

⁸² This male Brahman is equal to the imperishable highest (neuter) Brahman 8.3, 10.12; Nirvana that is Brahman too subsists in Him (6. 15); He is even higher (11.37), as the base and supporter of Brahman, similar to what we read in SU. 5.1; He is the 'Unknown Other' in Isa Up. 13. He is mighty God, param-brahma-param= beyond this, beyond Brahman higher, the mighty God (SU. 3. 7).

it is not super-physical power but sensitivity of the heart that is required for the perception of the intangible.

The perception of the intangible is the way indicated by the mystics of all ages and of all lands. But there is another category of perception, occultism, which does not deal with the intangible but with the invisible; it is the extension of scientific method into realms that are super-physical. Perceptions are of three kinds: they are the Perceived, Unperceivable, and the Unperceived. The first group is recognized by the senses and belongs to the commonsense perception; the second Unperceivable belong to the extra-sensory realms and is recovered by the sciences, physical as well as the super-physical by extension of the consciousness. The Unperceived are those that can be perceived but we do not perceive them due to an insensitivity of the heart, and this is the province of mysticism and it is concerned with the perception of the intangible by deepening of the consciousness.⁸³

Mehta says that the eleventh chapter concerns seeing the invisible, intangible, and quotes Radhakrishnan who says that Arjuna, having understood the mystery of the Seen, now wants to see the embodiment of the Unseen-Divine some call mysticism of devotion.

As mentioned before, Som P. Ranchan too finds the same four units in the cosmic vision of Arjuna as does Arvind Sharma. Ranchan uses psychology, literature and philosophy to go into the problematic of the *Gita*; he calls the first of the four (*pasya*) units of this chapter, 'an ensemble', an assembly rather than 'a container', of a million divine forms. He calls Lord Krishna, in Jungian terms, the container of countless archetypes where each *archetype* is a special type in color, shape and quality displaying the Suns, Maruts, healers or destroyers.

In the second unit, Ranchan compares Arjuna's 'terror' in seeing the vision of these *archetypes* face to face, to facing sure death [death-bed anxiety], and the force is beyond the capacity of ordinary consciousness, which might give way to altered states. Greek

⁸³ Rohit Mehta, *Mind to Supermind: A Commentary on the BhagavadGita* (Bombay: Manaktala, 1966), 109-10.

mythology has similar stories: Semele losing her life on seeing Apollo; Psyche suffering for years for daring to see her divine lover, Amor in candle-light. In order to see the representations of the *archetypes* in our ordinary daily life we need superfine consciousness.

Arjuna is thoroughly nervous in the third unit seeing the rise of a thousand suns, and mouths devouring the Kaurava and the Pandava hosts, and Krishna covering all space. Ranchan explains that instead of 'being turned off', Arjuna is being 'turned on' by the vision so he could demand of Krishna who He was, and receive the answer that He is Time and now the *Kala-agni*, the 'fire of doomsday' and is bidden to do his duty of vital importance. Arjuna is being forced to fight, kill and annihilate without any qualms.

The fourth unit is a brief stanza which ends with the request for Krishna becoming his dear kind friend (*saumya*), which Krishna does, and Arjuna says he has 'returned to his senses and normal state'. Krishna reminds him that He has vouchsafed [formally entrusted] him with a vision that has never been given to any other mortal.⁸⁴

So Ranchan sees that the vision has done its job without causing any damage to the psyche of the individual but, on the other hand, transformed the person 'turned on' as we said earlier, to re-enter life with enhanced faith, knowledge and courage to choose to do his duty in the face of his dilemma. Even passively going with the current is a choice.

It should be appreciated that the author, be it Vyasa or Bhadarayana, is a very talented dialogue writer and screenplay director who has orchestrated such a breathtaking acceleration on a large screen, of the magnitude of endless space and endless time, activating the mystical without being injurious to the actor or the spectators. Here you see the songs of the devas, chants of rishis, music of the saints, reverberations of the pranava

⁸⁴ Ranchan, *Revisioning Gita*, 41.

OM, the pleadings, ecstatic praises, litanies and supplications of Arjuna. Besides, you see Krishna playing three parts: *Vishnu* of thousand arms; Narayana with four; and human Krishna with only two, thus acting the characters of eternal Creator, Sustainer, and friend. The cosmic vision is a great comedy with music and drama, and good success at the end of it: reconciliation of God and man in terms of love (*bhakti*).

In the end, (in 11. 55), after Arjuna's praise and thanksgiving for the vision (11. 36-49), Krishna, the *Yogesvara*, assumes his form of human friend again and teaches the centrality of the *Gita-yoga* of the individual which is *raja-yoga* (11. 52-55): In verses 48 and 53, Krishna repeats [for emphasis] that neither the *Vedas*, nor sacrifice, alms, rituals, or ascetic practices can one have such a vision but only by My 'grace' (*prasanna* and My own power (*atma-yogat* 11. 47). The vision is central to the *Gita* because it is here that the fundamental motive of the *Gita* comes into maturity. In the post-Upanishadic age, through this great vision, Vyasa has thus powerfully introduced three things: a personal God (Krishna), a religion of grace, (*bhakti*,) and salvation to all (by grace, not works).

Compared to the religions and faiths extant at that time, unlike, Brahmanic ascetic detachment (*kaivalya*) practices of yogas of various kinds, the *bhakti marga* is not a world rejecting religion but a warm, world affirming one that teaches closeness to God in the ordinary everyday life and demands of man responsibility for his actions. A person's work reveals his or her thoughts; good works come out of a good heart, and evil works from an evil one. *Karma* of love towards God (*bhakti*) alone is the best *karma*. As this love increases, the love of the world decreases; as love displaces hatred towards other beings, an individual can more easily commit himself completely to God (*sarana-gadhi*). All this is derived from Krishna's last words (11. 54-55): "worship Me and none other,

do non-attached works without desiring fruits, have Me be as your highest goal, [which is intuitive realization of the Self]; cut off attachments to Nature (*prakriti*, worldliness, materialism), do not hate any being at all; have loyalty, devotion and love, total, exclusive (*ananya*) and eternal attachment to Krishna so that you can come to Me” – a tall order indeed, but a do-able one with God’s grace and power (11. 47).⁸⁵,⁸⁶,⁸⁷

Radhakrishnan’s title to this chapter eleven, “Transfiguration,” brings to mind, the Transfiguration of Christ in the gospels. There are many similarities and many more differences between the two. There is the idea of the numinous, mystical, spiritual, supernatural in both; in both there are witnesses to the vision, Sanjaya in the *Gita* and the three disciples, Peter, James and John in the Bible who, though terrified of the tremendous experience at the beginning, wanted to stay longer because it was fascinating. There is a war in the background of the two Transfigurations, at Kurukshetra and at Calvary; the

⁸⁵ Krishna’s command to worship ‘Him alone-and-none-other’ (*ananya*) recalls the first two commandments of Moses: Thou shall not have any other gods, neither shall thou worship them or their idols... for as I am holy I want you to be holy too (having morality and ethical practices when you live among nations that do not have them). Looking at the history of Israel, it is these clear mandates demanding strict monotheism, devoid of apostasy and idolatry, which have kept the Jewish people as one nation for over 3000 years. Jehovah is a holy god who demands holiness and accountability of the people, especially because they have been given the freedom to choose to obey or not to obey; and accept punishment for violation of the covenant relationship. Our modern justice system too demands of us concurrence with the laws for the good of all the people in that system or else receive penalties for breaking them. It is true that retribution is more severe in more primitive ages and in more primitive societies even today. And yet there is ‘grace’ attached to law for the penitent and repentant. Just as Krishna says He is the ‘Home of the universe (*jagan-nivasan*)’ (11. 28, 25), the Old Testament God is called the refuge, shelter, fortress and strength.

⁸⁶ He had provided, through King Solomon etc., ‘Cities of Refuge’ for people who had committed man-slaughter, and even the ‘horns on the altar’ in his temple were places of refuge; he forgave King David who had repented of his adultery. He commanded his prophets, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah to preach morality and ethical behavior: honesty in the judicial system, trades, business and social life: not swindling the poor for a pair of sandals nor swallowing up the houses of the widows; not to have hatred, jealousy, anger, craving or greed. Amos 6. 6: “Let justice flow like a river”; Hosea 6.6: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”.

⁸⁷ In Christ these would be superseded by love and ‘grace’ and Paul writes, to Christians to “yield the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5: 22).

mission of the vision was to fight the war, which both warriors, Arjuna and Jesus will win in different ways, one by killing and the other by allowing to be killed. The Cross followed sometime after the Transfiguration. In one, there was utter devastation and loss of an entire civilization, while in the other the birth of a new peaceful way of love, the Church, although the practitioners of the religion do not often portray it. With the *Gita*, the *Bhakti* movement evolved as a new paradigm into a new religious way of life of love and devotion common for all people, male and female of upper and lower castes, although the upper class practitioners have corrupted it by perpetuating the past traditions and laws out of selfishness and greed.

After the resurrection of Christ, a new paradigm, a new way of life started in Palestine, entered the Greco-Roman world and spread. There are other similarities too which cannot be considered in this paper. Because of the similarities, scholars wonder if the *Gita* has absorbed some of the key principles of Jesus as it has done from Buddhism, Jainism, Sankhya and *Yoga*; that even if the *Gita* did not do so when it was first written by Vyasa, absorption may have happened later in the early Common Era. Now Indian Christians call Jesus *Yogesvaran* as he sacrificed his life for others; *Purushothaman*, the ideal man; *Deva-ati-deva* (primordial God of gods) etc., and use many words and ideas found in the *Gita* in their worship of Christ: 'the flame that does not flicker,'⁸⁸ the *sat-cit-ananda* (truth, wisdom and bliss), *prasada* (grace), *anugraha* (giver), *prema* (love) etc.

⁸⁸ Many churches have a 'perpetual' light hanging near the altar with a 'flame without flicker in a windless place' like an integrated *bhakta* and [God without change] (*Gita* 6. 19).

There are many differences too between the *bhakti* of the *Gita* and the Bible, but we will not go into them in this thesis.⁸⁹

Credit must be given to Krishna of the *Gita* for opening the door to God for all races, classes and genders, especially in the face of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Advaita*. In this there is similarity with Christ who opened the gate widely for the Gentiles and the whole world irrespective of race or gender to enter the Kingdom of God as children of God. However, the doctrines of salvation of the two have many differences although both are religions of 'grace'. In India, the idea of 'grace' illuminated by the *Gita* for the first time and developed greatly in Vaishnavism and Saivism has so much in common with the teachings of Christ, and yet, much more remains to be practiced by the devotees of both religions.

That 'I (God) love you well' (*ishto-asi-me*) is God's highest and 'the most mysterious doctrine' of the *Gita*, given at the very culmination of the *Gita* (18. 64, 65, 68, and also 12. 13-20). Friendship and 'grace' in chapter 11 grow into conditional love in 12.13-20, and advances to dear love reciprocating the love of the integrated, totally detached, totally devoted *bhakta* in chapter 18's *carama sloka* (last saying), 65 – 66.⁹⁰

⁸⁹The 'Shekinah' vision of Moses on Mount Sinai brings out the common idea of the *mysterium tremendum* in the vision of God, with many differences. In the Decalogue that Jehovah gave there was no partiality, no vertical hierarchical rigid caste-related inequalities in the name of God and the fear of re-births. It is the latter that empowers the Caste system. It appears that Manu's verse (1. 31) regarding the origin of the four castes is entered without any alteration into the Rig Veda (10.90) word for word, and caste-duties enjoined by the Manu Sastra (6.66;10.97) are quoted verbatim in the *Gita* (3.35; 18. 47). This inhuman Law of *Varna* is disfiguring the beautiful face of Mother India even today. This problem is discussed more in Section 5, the 'Misuse of the *Gita*.'

⁹⁰ Still it is not the unconditional love of the gospels: John 3. 16 God so loved the World that he gave his only son that whoever 'believes' in him will not perish but have eternal life", where no 'work' is mandated.

Martin Luther says, righteousness is by "*sola scriptura, sola gracia, sola fide*," not works.) (Romans 3: 22). "This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us first" (1 John 4. 10). Luther would go even another step forward to say that even the faith is given by God: in this, Vaishnavism and Saivism are closer to Luther and Paul than the *Gita*.

“I love you” is the climax of the *Gita* or its ‘highest mystery’, which is the deepest of the deep wisdom-word of God (‘*guhyad-guhyatamam-jnanam*’), which is revealed to His loving devotees (*bhaktas*). “I love you dearly,” or literally, ‘Loved you are by Me well’ (‘*ishto-asi-me-drdham*’); therefore I will tell you the way (*yoga*) to your salvation, come to Me without doubting.” The *Gita* had replaced its early teaching of total ‘detachment’ found in its first six chapters, by a total attachment from 7.1 until the end of the *Gita*. ‘Detachment’ of the world yields to ‘attachment’ to God, and gradually ascends the steps of this new teaching of ‘*raja-yoga*,’ to have salvation, not by *buddhi*, but by *bhakti* alone, which is an easier wisdom, [*sulabbha-jnana*], until its *Gita-Rahasya* attains its final climax in its last chapter, in 18. 65-68. Thus ‘The Song of the Lord’ closes with the most reassuring words of *Gita-Rahasya*, “I love you well.” Below, in Conclusion, we will see what the purport of this chapter (18) is.

THE PURPORT OF CHAPTER ELEVEN OF THE *GITA*

The eleventh chapter, together with the tenth, gives the essence of the whole of the Bhagavad*Gita*. The manifest splendor of the splendid things (*vibhuti*) of the immanent Reality present everywhere in the universe (Nature) is but intangible to the senses (*avyakta*), as it is only the outer garment and a tiny ‘fragment’ of the ‘whole’ majesty of the transcendent God. Its metaphysics is that the immanent, together with the transcendent, constitutes God. Two things are revealed by the Cosmic vision (*visva-rupa*): Firstly, that Krishna Himself is the Lord of creative power (11.8; 37), eternal, primordial paramount, personal God beyond *Brahman* (11.37), ever seen and unseen

‘*Carama sloka*’ is the ‘final important stanza’ of the *Gita*: 18. 64-65: some would consider that the verses that follow the *carama-sloka* may be an epilogue or an addendum to the *Gita*.

(11.3-4), and fearful (11.24); secondly, at the end of the vision, to show His gracious form (11.51) and reveal (in chapter 12) that *bhakti* is the devotional loving personal relationship between Him (God) and human beings (11.53-55), without the necessity for the *Vedas*, grim ascetic practice, alms or sacrifice (11.48; 53).

Krishna schemes (uses *maya*) to worsen Arjuna's dilemma due to the conflict between *Kshatriya-dharma* and family-*dharma* by giving him a new craving,⁹¹ i.e., to see His unmanifest Reality; however, by His divine power, through the cosmic Vision, Krishna converts his craving into an ecstasy and causes a transformation in him to accept his *karmic* duty. The *Gita* presumes that Arjuna has the freedom of choice; and he would use it to resolve his conflict by selecting the path of wisdom (*jnana-yoga*) to do his duty (*karma-yoga*) of fighting the war as a true *Kshatriya* rather than be compelled by nature later on to do the same. As a grand finale, Krishna gives him a striking new teaching about *bhakti yoga* which he may add to his *Kshatriya* duty and *karma yoga*. So what is the purport of the theme of the story?

The core of the teaching of the *Gita* is twofold: a metaphysical thesis that affirms the superiority of the Personal God over the great *Brahman*, and the practical wisdom about the superiority of *bhakti-marga* over *jnana-karma marga*. Then the theory and practice are merged into praxis of the ideal way to God with the rationale that there is no God but Krishna and no way but *bhakti* open to every man and every woman of every caste, every race and every inborn-tendency, (every *guna*, *varna* and *svabhava*), thus graciously combining both *jnana-marga* and *karma-marga* within *bhakti-marga* (*'jnana-karma-*

⁹¹ 'Craving for more work' being part of *rajasa*, *Kshatriya* nature, Krishna utilizes it. But it does not seem to make the slightest difference whether one is fighting in a just or unjust cause; Duryodhana's cause was unjust in the Mahabharata, but it is Arjuna, who goes to hell (2. 31-33 n Zaehner) because craving is an activity that leads to rebirth.

anugrahith'), the '*tri-margas*'. Thus chapter 11 of the *Gita* is extremely ingenious in establishing *bhakti* as the new ideal way to God, without discarding either *jnana* or *karma* marga already in vogue at that time, but allowing them both to be embraced, by adding them as inferior alternatives to *bhakti*. So far so good.

However, there is a glaring contradiction here that runs against the grain of *bhakti*; it is the enforcement of *varna-dharma* on Arjuna by Krishna by His sheer power as Isvara (4. 13),⁹² which, I think, is a contradiction that violates the virtues of love, grace and equality of *bhakti*. Yet, there are defenders of this contradiction, such as Heinrich Zimmer, who would emphasize the value of such a contradiction and call it only apparent or irrelevant, and Max Weber who sees the *Gita*'s approach to caste *dharma* as its originality and considers the relationship between the opposites such as racial purity-impurity or superior-inferior as illusory.⁹³ But these modern western philosophers do not understand the gravity of injustice and sufferings that the caste system has caused to the low caste people in the last two thousand years or more.

⁹² *Gita*: 4. 13: "The four-caste system did I generate with categories of constituents and works; of this I am the doer; the changeless one does not do." Zaehner's notes on p.187 explain, how from the empirical point of view the law of *karma* binds God, the only true agent, to what he does: this is *maya*, which is contradicted by the absolute point of view, where the Absolute does not act. But for the *Gita* it is a combination of both dynamism and rest.

Whatever may be the philosophical argument for castes, a man of another race and his posterity being forced to carry a basket of human-soil on the head in the name of God without desire for fruits can never be an illusion but only an inhumane reality.

⁹³ "Roland Kapferer, *Contradiction and Logic of Conversion in the Bhagavad-Gita*, in "New Essays in the Bhagavad-Gita" Compiled by Arvind Sharma, (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1987), 127-137. Kapferer refers to Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 39-44; 184; and Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 35: as a reference to a controversy between 'structuralistic' and 'Relationalistic' theories:

High and low castes are not theoretical, symbolical, speculative paradoxes or illusions but real blatant contradictions allowing learning, leisure and loftiness to stand side by side with real human suffering, indignity and deprivation. How does the author of the *Gita* contradict himself so easily? Such contradiction should not be maintained by allegorizing, spiritualizing, rationalizing, or reconciling but be viewed as illogical extraneous materials introduced by racist interpolators.

This contradiction runs palpably against the current of love and grace of the *Gita*'s surge, *bhakti*. Hence, one could postulate that the discordant teaching of color is possibly a deliberate and opportunistic insertion of a social law into the 'best-seller' of the day; that it is possibly an interpolation into a piece of religious literature (*smriti*) widely read and loved by the masses; that it is probably done by an interested, beneficiary party. This should be seen as an abuse of the *Gita* to the advantage of the Aryan classes, especially the *Brahmin*, and a manipulation of the so-called lower classes and castes to consent to cheap or unpaid labor and disrespect, for fear of punishment of God.

This view is plausible because, even today, the same upper castes quote the *Gita*'s lofty principles, especially of doing one's own work ordained by nature, working without expecting the fruits of one's labor, and accepting these atrocities by self-surrender. The beneficiaries demanded continued subordination of the lower castes in the name of God and fear of rebirths, without trying to reduce or stop the shame and suffering attached to those menial duties which are handed down to their progeny endlessly.

Here rebirth or re-incarnation is not recollection of past deeds, which may be resolved, but judgment for deeds in a previous life (*karma*) which cannot be reconciled. The *Gita*'s theory of *karma* does not promote justice: You sorrow for men who do not need your sorrow, for your actions to lessen suffering interfere with cosmic justice (2.11, 22);⁹⁴ it also bestows an attitude of superiority to the upper caste that it is by their past good *karma* they now deserve their high birth-rank and benefits. On the victims' side, it

⁹⁴ Vishal Mangalwadi, *When the New Age Gets Old: Looking for greater spirituality* (Downesgrove, Illinois: IVP, 1992), 194 - 96. Vishal quotes Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, (Harmond'sworth, Penguin Books, 1975), 46: "The doctrine of *karma* also provided a philosophical justification for caste." Even Mahatma Gandhi concluded that reincarnation is a burden too great to bear. Compare this with Jesus' answer regarding the man born blind, whom he healed: He is not blind because of his own sin or of his parents' (John 9.2)..

undermines their individual significance that even those with education, affluence and superior moral character accept violation of morality and social discrimination as *dharma*, justice. When religion is blended with tradition, unthinking people do not know how to evaluate the two separately. They accept abuse as remedy for sufferings of *karma* that they may be born in a higher caste in their next birth, and thereby perpetuate the cruel hierarchy of caste generation after generation. Even the *Sudra* castes enjoy some pride and satisfaction that they are better than many sub-castes that are even lower. Generally, they willingly accept man-made *svadharma* and *svakarma* laws of *manava-dharma* of Manu as if they were of divine institution.

2.3 THE IDEA OF BHAKTI

As we have seen earlier, the idea of love in a religious sense or even words akin to love, such as, grace (*anugraha*) or compassion (*karuna*) are not found in any *Upanishad* except the late *Upanishad*, *Svetasvatara*.⁹⁵ This makes one wonder about the nature of the Upanishadic theism, the relation of man and *Brahman* or man and God in these times, and the reason for this absence. One does not see the thought of grace or love in either the early *Upanishads* written from 500 BCE, or in the later *Upanishads* written up to 100 BCE,⁹⁶ although the Buddha was living and teaching in the 400s, and Buddhism was

⁹⁵ The late *Upanishads*, the *Katha*, *Kaushitaki*, *Svetasvatara* and *Mandukya Upanishads*, are dated as late as c. 400-120 BCE 'i.e., after the death of the Buddha and the Vardhamana Jaina, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

⁹⁶ Wendy Doniger, *Chronology of events, 600 BCE to 232 CE*, (p. 93) could be seen on p. xiv of this paper. She gives the Mahabharata Epic with the *Gita* in it between 300 BCE and 300 CE. D. D. Kosambi, "Historical Development of the Bhagavad Gita," in *Studies in the History of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya Vol. 1. (Calcutta: Bagchi & Company, 1978), 248: Kosambi would put the *Gita* between 150 CE and 300 CE because of the high *Sanskrit* in which it is written

using these terms in its writings.⁹⁷ From 300 BCE to 300 CE, when the *Mahabharata* Epic was being written, there was a great dearth of grace. It appears that the author of the *Gita* found this to be the right time to introduce his gospel of love in India, and made the *Gita* abundant in love and grace. We will explore Grace in the *Gita* later on. It appears that the Aryans absorbed *ahimsa* from the Buddhists, which is one of the four great *brahma-viharas* (perfect virtues) and stopped blood-sacrifice, but did not absorb *metta* (amity, compassion, friendliness). *Metta* of Buddhism is not the same as Christian love or *agape*. It is used 33 times in the Old Testament, 70 times in a single Pali Buddhist Scripture, but only once in the *Upanishads* as 'god Mitra, (the double of Varuna) was a friendly god.' Friendship may be old in India, but absence of amity in a text is significant. In Buddhism, compassion or friendliness is not taught as an essential way of 'becoming More in the wayfaring toward the Most,' for liberation, but as a natural occurrence in the person.⁹⁸

As the commentaries of national leaders such as Tilak express, Hinduism is not world and life negating religion; according to Radhakrishnan the *Gita* is an ethical treatise, a *yoga-sastra*.⁹⁹ The view that Hinduism is so obsessed by its quest for 'liberation' that it has very little to say in the matter of day-to-day morality and of

⁹⁷ The four '*Brahma-Vihara*' or the four perfect virtues are: limitless kindness towards all beings, limitless compassion towards those who are suffering, limitless sympathetic joy over the salvation of others from suffering, and limitless equanimity toward friend and foe. Practicing these will bring about rebirth in the heaven of Brahma – hence the name, *Brahma-Vihara*. The Sanskrit equivalents are *maitri*, *karuna*, *muditta* and *upeksha*. Buddhism has no God and therefore no *bhakti* to God. The *Upanishads* are in a period of transition from reaching by intuition the nameless-formless-timeless Absolute *Brahman-Atman-Self* by the 'transcendent self' to intuitive realization of God who transcends Brahman in the later *Upanishads*, *Katha* and *Svetasvatara*, which are the stepping-stones to theism and *bhakti*. The *Isa Upanishad* of 18 verses bears the name of God as *Isa* (Lord) which stands for *Isvara*.

⁹⁸ Rhys Davids, What Buddhism Did: Is Buddhism an expansion of Hinduism? in *Outlines of Buddhism* (London: Methuen & Co, 1934), 26-38. Wayfaring is a Buddhist concept: Buddhists are wayfarers towards the fourth stage, *Nirvana*, which the monks alone reach; the lay make it only the third stage – non-return.

⁹⁹ P. M. Thomas, *20th Century Indian Interpretation of BhagavadGita*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1987), 188.

people's relation to their fellow due to the lack of ethical emphasis among some modern Hindu apologists and an over-emphasis on the philosophical side which is irrelevant to the average Hindu. This view also stresses the importance of Upanishadic Hinduism at the expense of the mundane world as we see in the epics. The *Mahabharata*, India's gigantic epic, brings in a myriad of aspects of life in small scale, and the *Ramayana* focuses on the perfect life lived by Rama, the incarnate Vishnu. The dilemma of Yudhishtira is the tension between *sanatana dharma* of God, which is hard to know, and *manu-dharma* of man, which is inscribed in stone. The first is written in the social conscience and second in social cruelty. There is a tension between, right *dharma*, and right *karma*. Arjuna's tension in the *Gita* is between his social-*dharma* to his kith and kin and his caste-*karma* to kill the same in the battlefield. The tension between *dharma* and *moksha* is another tension to resolve as the two sides of the same coin for 'Right action' is the requirement for participation in the infinite, *bhakti*. Modern Indian thinkers have tried to re-interpret the *Gita*'s ethics of for a new code of conduct for the nation.¹⁰⁰

In the *Gita*, there is a shift from the participation in the *Vedic* sacrificial ritual and the ideal of holy indifference typical of the *Upanishads* to an intimate warmer relationship between God and human beings. The *Gita*, India's gospel of love, does not use *bhaj* to mean love in the hedonistic, secular, sexual or asexual manner. The *Gita* does not make use of sensuous sex symbols at all, which is common place in the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata-Purana* that employ sexual relationship to depict the love between God and the soul.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ P. M. Thomas, *20th Century Indian Philosophy*, p. 193.

¹⁰¹ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 44.

In the *Gita*, *bhakti* is proposed both as a means of release as well as the goal of liberation itself. As the means, *bhakti* denotes the love of God shown by the devotee with the view to attaining final liberation; and as the liberated state, *bhakti* signifies union with and surrender to God, which is the felt participation of the soul in the total being of God. In Saivism, God and the human self are distinct from each other even in the state of liberation and final *mukti*, as in Christianity. See below for the analysis of love as *bhakti*.¹⁰²

2.3 The analytic of *bhakti* in the *Gita*:

A. The Nature of *Bhakti*:

a

) *bhakti* and *karma*

b) *bhakti* and *jnana*: *bhakti* prioritized over *jnana* and *karma*

c

) *bhakti* and self-surrender

d) Supreme *bhakti*

e) God's love for and surrender to His *bhakta*

B a) Liberation

b) Salvation

2. 3. A. THE NATURE OF *BHAKTI*

Bhakti in the *Gita* is the means towards liberation and its completion as we have noted earlier. As common to all *bhakti* texts, *bhakti* is basically divided into inferior and higher, imperfect and perfect, named variously as *apara* and *para*, *gauni* and *suddha*, or *sadhana* and *siddha*. In the *Gita* *bhakti* is fourfold (7.16): the *bhakti* of the afflicted one; the inquiring one; the one desirous of wealth; and finally, the possessor of knowledge. In

¹⁰² See Christian love (*Agape*) in Chapter 1 of this paper.

other words, they are the penitent, the one who seeks wisdom, the one who strives for gain and finally the perfect *bhakta* who already possess knowledge. These four seem to resemble the *Saiva Siddhanta*'s four types of *bhakti*: *Carya*, *Kiriya*, *yoga* and *jnana*, the fourth alone being the perfect *bhakti*, where the final goal is the Lord.¹⁰³

2. 3. A. a

a. *BHAKTI* AND *KARMA*

Karma or activity is the law of nature and a law of God. Liberation is to be sought not by renouncing activity but renouncing all self-interest in the accomplishment of doing one's God-appointed duty, especially those obligations in accordance with one's station in life (*svadharma* Chapter 3; *karma-yoga* 18.41ff). True *sannyasa* is not inactivity (*naishkarmya* 3. 4), but disinterested activity (*nish-kama-karma*) abandoning all fruit of action (*karma-phala-tyaga* (6. 1; 18. 2, 5-6). It is self-interested desire (*kama*), not activity itself (*karma*) that binds one to work.

In *bhakti*, in the *Gita*, disinterested activity (detachment) finds the real meaning and purpose in single-minded attachment to Krishna: a complete God-centeredness casting all work on Him (3. 30), but doing it as an offering to Him (9. 27), in being only an instrument (11. 33). That devotee whose work is thus to Him, whose goal is God, who is void of enmity and free from attachment, comes to Me (11.55). *Bhakti* destroys sin and the potencies of sin in the self. The *Gita* says that even if the individual's conduct is most evil, if he devotes to God and none other, that individual should be considered good, for his intention is right. Very soon that person will become righteous in soul and gain

¹⁰³ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 78.

thereby eternal peace (9. 30-1). Krishna says to Arjuna, in the last chapter, to come to Him alone for refuge and release from all evil' (18. 66).¹⁰⁴

However, Dhavamony believes that the *Gita's* idea of evil remains hazy and unsatisfactory. Sin is generally an innate, egoistic 'desire' (3. 37): theoretical rather than actual, and can be removed by *bhakti*. The *Gita* does not know the deep humility of the repentant sinner and the important role of the deep feelings of shame and regret over doing something wrong. In one's love for God, this kind of repentant love emerges later in Hinduism, especially with the advent of the Tamil Saivite mystics of the seventh to fourteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵

2.3. A b

b. BHAKTI AND JNANA

True *bhakti* is saturated with *jnana*.

To them ever integrated and commune with Me in love I give that integration of the soul by which they may draw nigh to Me...I dispel their ignorance with wisdom's shining lamp...(10. 10 -11).

The goal of the athlete, now, is God; so he must move outward to draw nigh unto God who gives integration of the soul by which the *bhakta* can have communion with God in love: the combination of integration and love can be seen here. The *Gita* also reveals the wisdom that God dwells in the self (*andhar-atma*): in other words, to know that God is in you, the lamp that enlightens the total personality is itself the self: is the 'highest wisdom.' Ramanuja rightly says *jnana* here means knowledge of God. The lamp that stands unflickering in a windless place is the athlete who controls his thought, and practices integration of the self.

¹⁰⁴ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 78-79.

¹⁰⁵ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 79.

There is a difference between the integration of the self in chapter two and in chapter ten. In the former, the integration results in the 'fixed still state of *Brahman*,' but in the latter, love must be integrated into the self too, for the goal is now God: once he comes to 'know' God, he 'becomes *Brahman*' by the integration that God gives, and communes with God by drawing nigh to God with loving devotion. By a two-way process, God helps the one who desires to go nigh to God. This is further confirmed with splendid clarity in the last Chapter (18.49-56).¹⁰⁶ The perfect *yogin* transcends work (*naish-karmya-siddhi*) and achieves the 'still state' of *Brahman*, which is wisdom's highest goal, and *Nirvana*¹⁰⁷ too (18. 49-53); having become *Brahman* by love-and-loyalty he comes to 'know' God as He really is and possesses Him in His fullness, forthwith, by His grace (18. 54-56). Thus the perfect *yogin* transcends wisdom's highest goal by *bhakti*.

It must be emphasized that Krishna prioritizes *bhakti* over *jnana* and *karma* in these five passages (6. 8, 10, 14-15, 18-23, 27-32), which show the progressive stages of full liberation. In sum, the athlete of the spirit is the *bhakta*, who has integrated his self with *Brahman* first and then communes in love with God as abiding in all things, and abiding in God; he is the highest athlete of the spirit, for he is higher than the mere ascetic, the man of wisdom, and the man of works. But the most fully integrated is the man of faith who loves-and-honors Me, and is absorbed in Me (*bhakti*).

2. 3. A. c

C. BHAKTI AND SELF-SURRENDER

¹⁰⁶ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 294, n for 10. 10-11; and also see the exhaustive notes on 9. 34 (pp. 286-90) for the combination of *jnana* and *bhakti*. In the eyes of the author of the *Gita*, the old, largely Buddhist idea of 'liberation' – the transcendence of the phenomenal – is not the goal of the mystical life, but only the end of what is called in the West the '*via purgativa*,' (a place of preparation for heaven). However, Zaehner emphasizes that the transcendental that is won does not disappear. The religion of *bhakti* supersedes Sankhya, Brahmanism and Buddhism and establishes Theism.

¹⁰⁷ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 18. 49, n: "*naish-karmya-siddhim*" is the Buddhist *nekkhamma*, 'passionlessness.' This Buddhist 'perfection' is not yet even to 'become Brahman', let alone to enter God."

In the *Gita*, the sole object of *bhakti* is God, and a whole-hearted self-surrender to God is an essential element of *bhakti*. Non-attachment to things of the world (*nish-kama-karma*) finds its true meaning in the whole-hearted attachment and surrender to God. Krishna teaches that *bhakti* must be undivided (*ananya*) and unwavering (*avyabhicarin*); as He is the goal, the *bhakta* must offer *his* mind, love, service and sacrifice to Him, abandoning the fruit of every duty, and come to Him alone for refuge: (9. 34; 18. 66).¹⁰⁸

2. 3. A. d

d. SUPREME BHAKT: (*parama-bhakti*)

In the *Gita*, *bhakti* reaches its full significance only after “liberation,” i.e., integration of oneself with *Brahman* when the *bhakta* can advance towards God (9. 34). Supreme *bhakti* is the supreme goal of the integrated person beyond the realization of his transcendent self as *Brahman*: this state is unconditioned by space, time, matter, change or anything at all in the phenomenal world.

2. 3. A. e

e. LOVE BETWEEN ISVARA AND THE HUMAN BEING

This includes God’s love for the *bhakta* and His surrender to His *bhakta*. This aspect of *bhakti* is from God’s side. God intervenes personally and saves the self (soul) in bondage. God attracts and instructs the individual and is active in his soul (Self within the self) by His immanent presence in his soul, and by means of His *avatara* by His direct presence among the contingent beings. In the *Gita*, Krishna is good, gracious and merciful to all who turn to Him for refuge. He is the father of the world (11. 43), and friend of every being as he is to Arjuna at the *visvarupa* in Chapter 11. He is good to all

¹⁰⁸ M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 80.

with goodwill and dear beyond measure to His devotees who are dear to him. He is patient and forbearing to his *bhaktas* as He is to Arjuna. He adjusts Himself to the individual temperaments in the same way as they approach to him, showing His love (4. 11), as a father to his son, a friend to his friend and a lover to his beloved (11. 43).¹⁰⁹

In particular, God saves his *bhaktas*: no devotee of His is ever lost (9.31); He reveals Himself to his devotees by His grace (*prasada*) (11. 47, 18. 56, 73), makes them overcome doubts and obstacles (18. 58, 73), gives them supreme peace in salvation (18. 56, 62), refuge, deliverance from all evils (18. 66).¹¹⁰ *Bhakti* is easier than revering the unmanifest indeterminate *Brahman*.

2.3. B

LIBERATION

Moksha is viewed negatively in the *Gita*; it is “liberation” from evil and sin, from action and bond of action, and from death and rebirth. On the positive side, *moksha* is supreme perfection, the highest goal, the supreme abode, supreme happiness, peace, immortality. It is the ‘abode of Brahman’ (5. 19-20), ‘the *Nirvana* of *Brahman*’ (5. 14ff); it is going to *Brahman*, attaining *Brahman* (4. 24; 8. 24; 18. 50) and even becoming *Brahman* (5. 24; 6. 27; 14. 26; 18. 53-4).¹¹¹

The relation of the liberated soul to God, however, is by *bhakti*. The aspects of ‘Going to God,’ ‘dwelling in God,’ and ‘penetration into the substance of God’ are best realized in the supreme *bhakti*. Zaehner explains this state of supreme *bhakti* as the felt

¹⁰⁹ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 82

¹¹⁰ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 83.

¹¹¹ M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 79.

participation of the soul in the total being of God rather than the achievement of an individual *Nirvana*.’¹¹²

The *yogin* who participates (*mam bhajaty*) in me, who am present in all contingent beings, who, grounded in unity, is yet engaged in all manner of occupations, abides in me. (6.31).

But of all the athletes of the spirit the man of faith who loves and honors Me, His inmost self absorbed in Me, - he is the most fully integrated: this do I believe (6. 47).

These two verses (6. 31, 47) depict the best athlete of the spirit (*bhakta*) as the climax of the whole of the first section of the *Gita* (Chapters 1-6): there is no one more excellent than the *bhakta* with faith, love and honor for God in the inmost-self, he is absorbed-in-Him; he is the most fully integrated, purified and liberated individual-self (*jiva*); he is already in *Nirvana* that is *Brahman* too.¹¹³

2. 3. C

SALVATION

Explicating the verse, 6.47, Ramanuja says that the most integrated *yogi*’s innermost-self is absorbed-in-Him (*antaratmana mam bhajate*); or is lost-in-Him. The inmost-soul is the mind which is the receptacle of all external and internal impressions. Such a *yogin*’s mind, then, is lost in Him from the excess of love that he bears for Him, as He is different in essence from all else: therefore he cannot continue to exist without Him.¹¹⁴

Swami Abhisiktananda says, similarly, that “*guhya*” means a ‘cave,’ *antaratma*, a secret place of the heart, the interiority of the mystics, the deepest innermost abyss of their own heart; and we cannot enter the heart of God except by ‘losing’ ourselves in our

¹¹² M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 81 uses this quote from R. C. Zaehner, “*The Catholic Church and World Religions*,” (London: 1964), 37.

¹¹³ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 172.

¹¹⁴ *Gita* 6.47 is reminiscent of Augustine’s prayer, “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they have found their rest in Thee.” St. Paul says, “Do you not know that you yourselves are the temple of God and God’s Holy Spirit lives in you? Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 3: 16).

own depths first, and then by the inter-penetration of the hearts of man and God.¹¹⁵ Zaehner too compares this participation and interpenetration (3. 30, n) to God's love, *Agape*. God abides in the hearts of his lovers. It is no longer the isolation (*kaivalya*) of the eternal element of the *Sankhya* system, not even the fixed still state attained by becoming *Brahman*, but it is the highest level of *bhakti*, in which there is communication with God: a complete, personal indwelling of God experienced only by the person who has already achieved perfect liberation.¹¹⁶ This is what makes the *Gita*'s *bhakti* unique.

In the *Gita*, 'participation' is to be understood as being made fit for deification (*mad-bhavya* 13. 18); so the individual in this state simply goes to God, for He is the 'Way' (9. 18), or with this God-given wisdom comes to the liberated state. In other words, the individual reaches the first step which is the knowledge of self as *Brahman* (14. 2). As Ramanuja says, he then knows God as He is Himself ('*ab intra*'). God-realizing *bhakti* leads him to total possession of God's love and His being in His fullness, forthwith (18.55). This is disclosed in *Gita* 18. 64-66 as the great *Gita-Rahasya* or the most secret message of God's own love for the *bhakta*, the great secret of Salvation, *Brahma-Rahasya*, and the *truth of the truth* (*satyasya-satyam*) of *Chandogya Upanishad* (6. 29). In sum, Krishna promises to love him beyond measure who loves Him beyond measure. Unable to bear the separation from him, He will cause him to come to Him and possess Him, and will deliver him from all evils. This is Krishna's true promise: you will come to me, your final goal, your *moksha*.

¹¹⁵ Swami Abhisikatananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976), 119. He was a Benedictine monk and his real name was Dom Henri Le Saux: "None can enter the abyss of the heart of Christ save by undergoing death – for that heart was itself 'opened' by the thrust of the soldier's lance: it is by 'interpenetration' of the hearts. If the Christians have first lost themselves in their own depths, in this essential interiority, they can communicate this message to others from heart to heart."

¹¹⁶ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, notes on 13.29; 18.54.

LIBERATION AND SALVATION COMPARED

The *Gita*'s highest goal, *parama-gatim* or final liberation, seems to be a mixture of the theories that existed in its time. Its metaphysics is, however, different from that of the *Mahabharata* and the early *Upanishads*. *Bhakti* has no place in the Brahmanic idea of liberation.¹¹⁷ The *Gita* holds on to its own two key teachings that *bhakti* is the direct means to the goal, *moksha*; and that the distinction between God and the human continues in life and also after death.¹¹⁸

To achieve liberation or *moksha* which is the goal of the three aims of human life,¹¹⁹ one is to be disentangled from *karma* and cross the ocean of *samsara*. Though some think that being eschatological, achievement of *moksha* rests only on speculation; and that it being only the goal of faith, it may hardly be considered philosophy. Most schools conceived that the *moksha* ideal is realizable in this life. Now we will see a few views about *moksha*.¹²⁰ The Absolutist *Vedantin* view decides in favor of *jivan-mukti* or complete oneness with the Absolute, which is released even before death by means of *jnana* that removes ignorance so that the oneness continues even after the death of the body: the body, which is a mere illusionary appearance. The purely theistic view of liberation is in favor of continual progress towards *mukti* within the limits of the present life; however, with a persistent distinction between the person and God. Nyaya-*Vaisesika* and *Visishtadvaita* do not formally accept the *jivan-mukti* ideal, but they

¹¹⁷ Jan Gonda, *Notes on Brahman* (Utrecht: J.L.Bayers, 1950), 11-16: The *Gita* has non-theistic sources such as the *Upanishads* and theistic sources, e.g., Vasudeva (7.19; 11.50), Sankhya and Bhagavata creed which have been adjusted to the needs of the *Gita*: Hiriyan, *Outlines*, 131-33. Hiriyan, *Outlines*, 86-88. M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 76; Hiriyan, *Outlines*, 86-88.

¹¹⁸ Hiriyan, *Outlines*, 126. Hiriyan discusses *moksha* in Hinduism's different belief systems, (81-3).

¹¹⁹ The three aims (*tri-varga*) are *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* or acquisition of desired and desirable wealth, hedonistic and psychological pleasures of value, and ethical values which lead to the fourth aim, *moksha*.

¹²⁰ Hiriyan, *Outlines*, 19.

accept a clearly recognized possibility of a man reaching a state of enlightenment by means of *bhakti* which transforms his outlook upon the world and fills it with a new significance. The concept of *mukti* is very old. In fact, the *Katha Upanishad* (11.iii.14) speaks about *videhamukti* in which the consequences of the good and bad life led here have to be reaped elsewhere. Since the heterodox religions did not look forward to a future life and considered *moksha* negatively as an escape from the meshes of *samsara* here and now, the concept of *moksha* attained after life was irrelevant to them. Although the dogma of *moksha* points beyond intellectual satisfaction, it is still within the bounds of experience.¹²¹

The *Gita* has verses that say that Krishna may be reached by praying to Him even at the hour of death (8.5), but it abounds with the thought that He is realizable within the limits of this life (5. 19, 26). A superb example of this realization (2.55-58; 14.22-25) is the direct vision of God that Arjuna had with his god-given eyes (grace) while he is still alive (11.8). It is an important Christian teaching too that it is possible to live in God, while still living in the world: to be in the world, yet not of the world, but in God.¹²²

¹²¹ Hirianna, *Outlines*, 19.

¹²² The teaching of the Bible, that new spiritual life can start while yet alive and continue into the life after death, is close to that of the non-Advaitin view of the *Gita* that life with the fullness of God can be experienced in this life. At the grave of Lazarus Jesus tells Martha, "I am resurrection and life; He who believes in me lives even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die; do you believe this? (John 11. 25): there must be physical death but if a person has life in God on earth, he has no death. In Christianity as in Vaishnavism, there is distinction between God and man now and after death.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER TWO ON *BHAKTI*

The *bhakti* religion played the most dynamic game-change ever in India by superseding Vedism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and took the epoch-making first giant-step that opened the path to God for all levels of people alike.

As Zimmer says, that in the period of the *Upanishads*, before the ascendancy of *bhakti*, Brahmanical thinking founded on the realization of an all-unifying transcendent principle was well fitted to absorb not only the divine personalities of the earlier *Vedic* theism but also the much more sophisticated philosophic and devotional formulae of the non-Aryan Dravidian original traditions mentioned earlier. As for the *Gita*, it is the first classic *Sanskrit* sacred document that speaks of the first stages of this religious and philosophic adjustment in the light of the arrival of the younger theistic religion, *bhakti*, as a reciprocal loving relationship between a personal God and human beings.¹²³

The *Gita* points to the *bhakti* religion as a pathway (*marga*) to the Supreme with precedence over the religion of the *Vedic* sacrifices and of the *Upanishadic* liberation from human and material conditions. *Bhakti* ascends over *jnana* and *yoga* pathways both in value and esteem, by becoming *jnana* and *yoga* too. Krishna takes the seat of the *Sankhyan purusha*, and becomes the ground of the Absolute *Brahman* who is *Nirvana* too. Accordingly, *bhakti* absorbs *jnana*, *yoga*, *Sankhya*, *Vedanta* and *Buddhism* and ascends higher than any one of them individually, and all of them together. *Bhakti* is not a symbiotic living side-by-side with these schools and adapting itself to their means and goals, but is a unique entity selective in its absorption, assimilation and integration within itself, and rejection of what it cannot agree with.

¹²³ Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 380.

Furthermore, it is important to understand a vital distinction between Brahmanism's absorption and the *bhakti* religions' participation (or association) in the concept of *moksha*. In absorption, the soul becomes one with *Brahman* by its *svarupa* from within; but, on the contrary, in *bhakti*, when the soul participates, it reaches the presence of God from the outside and realizes God as distinct from itself: it does not fuse with God. The more the soul becomes one with God, the more it asserts its distinction. There is an explicit difference between the Upanishadic "whoever really knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*" "*Brahma Veda Brahmaiva Bhavati*" (Mu.U.3.2.9), and the *Gita*'s "my devotee-after being integrated comes to me" ("*mad-bhakta yanti mam api*" 7.23). This distinction, which is only implicit in the *Gita*, becomes explicit in the later *bhakti* religions, *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* of South India, as we have seen earlier.¹²⁴ As the Tamil saying goes, "However high the little sparrow flies, it can never become an eagle," and as Martin Luther says, "God is God and man is man;" man can never become God, but can have the likeness of God. The relationship between the two is grace on God's side and faith on the human side.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ M. Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 83

¹²⁵ Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther*, (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1986), 174.

CHAPTER 3

3. 1 TWO ANCIENT INTERPRETERS OF THE *GITA*

3. 2 TWO MODERN INTERPRETERS OF THE *GITA*

Commentaries indicate to us what the *Gita* meant to its commentators and to their contemporaries. And yet, all scriptures have two sides: a) the eternal, imperishable truths and visions applicable to all ages and b) the temporary and perishable ideas, intellectual expressions, psychological idioms belonging to the contemporary time. Commentators take the ancient wisdom of the scriptures and express them in a new form relevant to the age and responsive to its needs: dealing with orthodoxy and dynamic new thinking in a changing and expanding world with explosive freedom.

The two most important ancient traditional commentators of the *Gita* are *Srimad* Sankaracharya, who fashioned his commentary to face up to the religious and philosophical challenges of his time, and *Srimad* Ramanujacarya, who challenged the *Advaita* doctrine of Sankara and re-interpreted concepts such as *jnana*, *karma* and *dharma*, and the metaphysical Reality implied by them from the view-point of *bhakti*. We will next review the two most important modern commentators of the *Gita*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, who purport to forge a dynamic national ideology that faces up to the challenges of their day in their different ways.

We will start with *Srimad* Sankaracharya in the following section.

3. 1 TWO ANCIENT INTERPRETERS OF THE *GITA*

3.1. A. SRIMAD SANKARACARYA (C.788-820 CE)

The most outstanding philosopher, Sankaracharya, lived almost a millennium after the era of the *Gita*. He is a Saivite Brahmin from Kaladi, Kerala in South India, to whom we owe the best known philosophy of India, viz., *Advaita Vedanta* – in the form in which it has stood for twelve hundred years. Sankara is considered a genius: a great intellectual, logical thinker, astute dialectician and a remarkable religious poet who wrote extensive commentaries on the *prastana-trayi*, (the *Brahma-Sutra*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Gita*). Within such a very short life-time (32 years), he traveled all over India and established his doctrines and founded an order of Hindu monks. Many would rightly compare him to St. Thomas Aquinas. It will be remembered that Sankara uses the *Gita* to support his own doctrine of *Advaita Vedanta* or Absolute Monism.

Even B. G. Tilak, who rejects Sankara's interpretation of the *Gita* as *Vedantic*-sectarian, nevertheless, acknowledges him as an extraordinary scholar and sage who established the system of the classical *Advaita Vedanta* thought on the firm foundation of the Religion of the *Vedas*.¹²⁶ Like Tilak, W. P. D. Hill too asserts that Sankara could not conceal the fact that the *Advaita* and the *Gita* systems are not at one.¹²⁷ Sankara decided to be sectarian because when he took up the explication of the *Gita*, Hinduism was confronted by other powerful philosophies extant then as Hinduism is in our time. His activity resulted in the closure of many Buddhist monasteries.

¹²⁶ Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Srimad BhagavadGita-Rahasya* (Poona: Tilak Brothers Publications, 1917, 13. Tilak interprets the *Gita* from a social activist point of view.

¹²⁷ W. P. D. Hill, *BhagavadGita* (London: 1928), 273. Hill is a much admired translator of the *Gita*. Hill says that Sankara places undue emphasis on the power of knowledge ...while Ramanuja errs perhaps in excessive emphasis on *bhakti*, 274.

A critical assessment of Sankara's views on the *Gita* should begin with Sankara's reference to the doctrine that the *Gita* sets forth the quintessence of the *Upanishads*, and that its main conclusions harmonize with the teachings of the *Brahmasutra*. At the same time, Sankara is aware that the emphasis of the *Gita* is not always identical with the *Upanishads* and the *Brahmasutra* texts. Sankara, on a universal reading, sees the Absolute *Brahman* as supreme, whereas the *Gita*, on a considered and unbiased reading, uplifts God above *Brahman*. We can see this tension by letting Sankara's *BhagavadGita-Bhashya* (commentary) speak for his ideas. The tension is more vivid when Sankara's *Gita-Bhashya* is countered by the *Gita-Bhashya* of Ramanuja, the founder of the Qualified Advaita-Vedanta. Let's see some of the concepts of the *Gita* that Sankara attacks.¹²⁸

First of all, in his famous *Bhashya*, Sankara firmly deduces that the *Gita* is only a *smriti*, not a *sruti*, and it does not deserve the status of a *sruti* because it does not contain inerrant truth as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* do. Supporting this argument, in his explication of *Gita* 13.1-4, Sankara defines the truth of field as only what had been sung by seers such as Vasishta in various hymns, and what is reasoned in the aphorisms such as the *Brahmasutra*, are steps to know and attain *Brahman*, the knower-of-the-field: *Brahman* utterances are veridical, conclusive and free from doubt.¹²⁹

Besides, in his famous *Gita Bhashya*, Sankaracharya does not give the full status of God to the *avatar*.¹³⁰ Following their founder, the *Advaitin* commentators of Sankara

¹²⁸ M. Narasimhachari, *The Visishtadvaita Philosophy in The Perspectives of Theism and Absolutism in Indian Philosophy* (Madras: Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda College, 1978), 2: Ramanuja refutes the *mayavada* concept and the seven-fold inconsistencies found in the Advaita concept of *avidya*.

¹²⁹ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 336-44: explores this passage (13. 4-25) regarding the hierarchy of *Purusha*, *Brahman* and the Personal God, who is *Purushottama*; A. G. Krishna Warriar, *Bhagavad Gita Bhashya*, 422.

¹³⁰ *Sruti* is revealed Scripture; *sastra* or *smriti* is human science.

also interpreted the *Gita*, not as scripture, but as the 'science' of salvation (*moksha-sastra*) which was realization of the self, and emphasized knowledge (*jnana*) as the path for *moksha* of the individual, but neglected the individual's social duty (*dharma*). In the hands of the *acariyas* and religious leaders, therefore, the *Gita* became a weapon of dialectical warfare.

Is Krishna an *Avatara* (incarnation) or a '*nara*' (man)?

Sankara does not give full status of God to Krishna, the *avatara* because Krishna is the son of human parents, Devaki and Vasudeva. Sankara cannot accept Krishna as revelation of the full divinity of God because he interprets *avatara* as only a partial (*amsena*) descent (coming down) of Vishnu. Hence, Krishna is not greater than the Absolute ineffable transcendent *Brahman*, the "One-without-a-second."¹³¹

Further, Sankara does not acknowledge the *Gita* as scripture (*sruti*) because, according to orthodox Hindu tradition, only the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are revealed scriptures (*sruti*). Hence, Sankara does not grant independent status of a *sruti* either to the *Gita* or to the *Brahma-Sutra*: the *Gita* is not an original religious text, but dependent on the *Upanishads*; and the *Brahma-Sutra*, is only a summary of the *Upanishads*. As such, both are only derivatives of the *Upanishads*. Thus, neither the *Gita* nor the *Brahma-Sutra* has the status of a *sruti* and therefore, the status to be a part of the *prastahana-trayi*. Finally, arguing that since the *Gita* is not a *sruti*, Sankara infers, it should be reduced to the level of a *sastra* (or a *smriti*), and denied it the authority of a Scripture.

¹³¹ R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 8. To Sankara, Reality, Brahman is unfractionably one, all diversity and multiplicity is ultimately illusory appearance. This world is an illusory appearance (*maya* or *prakriti*), conditioned by space, time, causation and action (change, *karma*). But, God, as an agent, involved in the affairs of the world is not fully real. This is not just a metaphysical statement but a fact of mystical experience.

In the introduction to his *Gitabhashya*, Sankara puts the relevance of the *Gita*, in a nut-shell, by addressing it as '*Gita-Sastra*,' the essence of the meaning of the whole *Vedic* teaching: in brief, the knowledge of its teaching will lead to the realization of all human aspirations."¹³² In his *Gita-dhyanam* (the opening meditation of the *Gita-Bhashya*), the famous verse expresses the same thought by a simile that all the *Upanishads* are the cows (*gavo*), Krishna the cowherd (*Gopala nandana*) who milks the cows and feeds Arjuna, the calf (*bhakta*) with *Gita*, the cream (*amrtam*).¹³³ This shows Sankara's view of the *Gita* as entirely dependent on the *Upanishads*, and, undoubtedly, Sankara is right in saying so. However, Sankara does not mention of *Gita's* dependence on, or its subordination to, the scriptures in the *Gita-Bhashya* text itself.¹³⁴

Contrary to Sankara, many translators add the 'colophon' at the end of each chapter of the *Gita*, which says that 'the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue is an *Upanishad*' that teaches *Brahma-jnana and yoga-sastra*. But one cannot build an argument to support the *sruti* status of the *Gita* from a colophon, for scholars, such as Belvalkar, observe that the colophon is much later than the text itself, and that it may have been added at the time when the *Gita* was included into the Mahabharata epic.¹³⁵

Vadekar puts forth an interesting way of looking at the history of the philosophic speculation of the three writings: the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, utilizing the Hegelian dialectic of 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis.' As Sankara insists, and Ramanuja

¹³² C. M. Thomas, *Twentieth Century Indian Interpretations of BhagavadGita: Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo*, (Bangalore: ISPCK, 1987), 10. Thomas has a degree from the McMaster University, Canada, Ph. D from the Christian Theological Research Centre, Bangalore, India and an Advanced Study in Philosophy from the Banaras Hindu University, India. Thomas' research under the supervision of Prof. A. G. Arapura: *taditam Gita-sastram samasta-veda-artha-sara-samgraha-bhutam...*

¹³³ A. G. Krishna Warriar, (Tr.), "*Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhashya Sri Sankaracharya*," (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math Publication, Vedanta Press, 2007), xlx, "*Gita dhyanam*" is the 'Opening Meditation' of the *Gita-Bhashya*.

¹³⁴ P. M. Thomas, *Twentieth Century*, 20.

¹³⁵ P. M. Thomas, *Twentieth Century*, 12.

agrees, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are, undoubtedly, the *Gita's* historico-philosophical antecedents, distinct from its socio-political background. To quote Vadekar:

The *Vedic* period would be the thesis, the Upanishadic period the antithesis and the *Gita* the synthesis of the two.... Expanding the Hegelian formula, the thesis is the substance of the *Vedic* philosophy: a theological pluralism coupled with a practical Hedonism (search for human welfare and happiness). The antithesis is the Upanishadic reaction against the *Vedic* pluralism: the quest for the one reality, *Brahman* that is behind the world and the final goal of realizing the identity of the Brahman and the Atman; renunciation of the world in the quest for the self as the highest good prescribed by the *Upanishads*. The *Gita* achieves the synthesis of the two: It stands neither for the *Vedic* "Pluralism" nor the Upanishadic "Singularism" but for the "Many which are the One and One which appears in the Many". The ethical ideal that the *Gita* presents is union with this "One," through *jnana*, *bhakti* or *karma*." ¹³⁶

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rishna Warriar, a *Vedantin*, who has translated and commented on the *Gita*, argues for the solid basis of Sankara's *Gita-bhashya*, and maintains that Sankara does not unfairly inflate *jnana* above *bhakti* and *karma* in the *Gita's* scheme of liberation but rather takes an objective view of the relevance of the threefold means to practical achievement of emancipation, and the mutual relations among *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana*; the advaitic metaphysics of Sankara holds that actions pertain to one's aptitudes, capacities (4.11) and enlightenment, not to the immutable (*kutastha*) Reality (3.30; 11.34,). He charges those, who talk of Ramanuja being nearer to the intention of the *Gita* than Sankara [such as R. C. Zaehner], of forgetting that the *Gita* is a unified work that has arrived at an ultimate Monism. Sankara argues that the God of the *Gita* is personal-impersonal combining the attributes of a monotheistic deity and those of the *Upanishadic* Absolute *Brahman*; and therefore, devotion to *saguna Isvara* can be logically synthesized with knowledge of

¹³⁶ P. M. Thomas, *Twentieth Century*, p. 18 is from D. D. Vadekar, The Synthetic Character of the *Gita* Teachings, in "Studies in the *Gita*," 54-55.

nirguna Brahman. He further asserts that since devotion is only a means, or even an indispensable means to win the saving knowledge, the *Gita* necessarily blends devotion and knowledge as the means and the end respectively.¹³⁷

Warrier, an *Advaitin*, underscores the superiority of knowledge through two eloquent verses, 10.11 and 7.18 of the *Gita*. In the former, it is the lighted lamp of knowledge that destroys the darkness born out of ignorance, and not *karma yoga* or *bhakti yoga*, and in the latter, the *jnani* is singled out among the four types of *bhaktas* as the very Self of the Lord. It is very interesting to note how Sankara glosses 7.18 interpreting all the Me, My and Mine of Krishna, in the verse, as the highest *Brahman*, not Krishna son of Vasudeva [a mere man], as given below:

All these four are indeed noble; even the first three are dear to Me. No devotee of Mine is other than dear to Vasudeva. But the knower is exceedingly dear. This is the distinction. Why? The answer is that the knower is the very Self - not different from Me. This is My settled doctrine. The knower seeks to ascend the very peak of knowledge: "I Myself am the Lord Vasudeva, I am none else." With a mind concerned on this knowledge, he strives to reach Me, the Supreme *Brahman*, the goal without parallel.

S

ankaracharya's *Bhagavad Gita Bhashyam* (7.18).¹³⁸

To this same verse, Ramanuja gives a completely different gloss: The maintenance of My (God's) very self is dependent on my (individual's) self. God is as dependent on the individual self as the latter is on Him.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Warrier, *Gita-Samiksha*, x; p. 5-6.

¹³⁸ Warrier, (Tr.), "*Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhashyam of Sri Sankaracharya*," (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math Publication, Vedanta Press, 2007 xv. The quotation is Warrier's translation of Sankara's gloss on 7.18 in the *Bhagavad Gita Bhashyam* of Sri Sankaracharya, 264. Warrier is a firm follower of Sankara.

¹³⁹ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 250.

The value of the *Gita* today among the Advaitins

This discussion illustrates the tension that the *Advaitins* pose between *jnana* and *bhakti*, and their condescending attitude to assimilate *bhakti* into *jnana* as a lesser partner. Ever since the *bhakti* religion became prominent, many *Advaitins* are combining knowledge of the *Brahman* with worship of the deities of the *Visishtadvaitins* or the *Saivites* or others even at the present time: Sankara's *Advaitic* principle appears to have become overlaid with a polytheistic tendency. The Non-dualists explain it thus: worshipping God with qualities (*sa-guna*) appears as if he were the Absolute without qualities; hence, worship does not pose any problems if you believe in a dualism separating you from God who has qualities.¹⁴⁰

In spite of this broadened outlook and practice, the centers of learning (*Matts*) thrive in Sankara's name even today in the four corners of India (in Dwaraka, Puri, Bhadari and Kanchipuram) and bear Sankara's argument that the phenomenal world of everyday experience and its biological round of birth and death (*samsara*) is ultimately unreal and the source of our bondage is taken as the basis for a monastic or ascetic life of renunciation (*sannyasa*). Though there were ascetics before the time of the *Upanishads*, Sankara gave asceticism an official backing. As caste is central to *Uttara Meemamsa* and *Purva Meemamsa*, it is logical that Sankara prescribed *sannyasa* only for the *Brahmin* men in the fourth *purushartha* (stage of life).

Ramanuja called Sankara a cryptic Buddhist (*prachanna-Buddha*) waving a yellow flag. Sankara perhaps borrowed the idea of formal monastic orders and institutions from the *Buddhists* and worked them out for Hinduism. Besides, religious reversals have been

¹⁴⁰ Wendy Doniger, "The Hindu," p. 508.

effected by religious leaders, time and again, to gain power and numbers. Those who were defeated by Sankara in debate were proselytized, made to drop their own religion, whether *Buddhism*, *Jainism* or any Hindu sect, and assume non-dualist *Vedanta* along with their disciples and followers, sometimes by the hundreds.

Sankara's '*kevala-advaita-jnana*' ways to *moksha* are long and laborious; they 'isolated' its possibility for the 'privileged' that had access to the *Vedas*; a certain attitude of the Advaitins holding themselves superior is cultivated among themselves. The less-privileged people were obliged to accept the *Advaitins*' attitude of superiority. The effect of these prejudices on the *bhakti* religion and the *bhaktas* who were largely from the lower social classes necessitated the radical and revolutionary nature of Vaishnavism of Ramanuja, which we will discuss next.¹⁴¹ It should be remembered that the situation that Sankara confronted, when he took up the explication of the context of the *Gita*, would be paralleled by what Ramanuja faced later on.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Watson and Kaserkodi, *Bhakti Studies*, (Delhi: Stirling Publishers, 1992), 132 ff: in *Sankara, Ramanuja and Bhakti*.

¹⁴² Aldous Huxley, *The Song of God*, Tr. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, 1945, 13, 22. In his introduction, Huxley calls the *Gita* as one of the most comprehensive summaries of the perennial philosophy ever to have been made. Hence *Gita*'s enduring value, not only for Indians but for the whole world.

3. 1. B

SRIMAD RAMANUJACHARYA (C1017-1137CE): The Historic Necessity for His System:

Ramanuja is the originator of the philosophy of *Visishtadvaita* or Qualified non-dualistic Monism, but not the founder of the devotional (*bhakti*) cult. He is concerned with establishing the absolute supremacy of the personal God (Krishna) not only over the phenomenal world, but most importantly, also over the impersonal Absolute, *Brahman* as well. In this, he reacts against the absolute monism of Sankara. It is important to note that the *Gita* forms the essential source of Ramanuja's teachings.¹⁴³

There had been a devotional aspect within the Hindu religion in India several centuries before the *Bhagavad-Gita* had been written. The essential contribution of Ramanuja to Indian thought was to have developed a coherent philosophical basis for the doctrine of *bhakti* to God in sharp contradistinction to Sankara's *Advaita* philosophy. Ramanuja reconciled the mystic *bhakti* of the *Alvars*, the older *Vedic* tradition which included the inerrant *Vedas*, the prestigious *Gita*, the *Brahma-Sutras*, the socially inescapable *smritis* as interpreted by himself into one movement.

The tenth chapter of the *Gita* is profuse with the names of gods and deities: Vishnu, Rudra-Siva, the Sun, the stars, moons, the storm gods; priests such as *brahaspati*, sages, seers, sacrifices, prayers and utterances of Om. However, a fresh surge of devotional fervor started in the Tamil country in the seventh century and spread to the rest of the subcontinent. Vishnu and Siva were the greater gods of this *bhakti* movement, which flourished among the indigenous people who were not pure Aryan. The religion caused a threat to *Brahmin* orthodoxy and a division between *Aryan* and *Dravidian* peoples. When

¹⁴³ R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 8.

Sankara came into the picture in the eighth century, he wrote his famous extensive commentaries on the three foundations of *Vedanta* philosophy: the *prasthanatrayi* (the chief *Upanishads*, the *Brahma-sutras* and the *Gita*) to advance his teachings of non-duality as superior to *bhakti*. In contrast, three centuries later, Ramanuja taught that worship of God required a distinction between the worshipper and the one worshipped, and wrote his critical commentaries on the *Brahmasutra*, the *Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana* to counter the Advaitic teachings of Sankara.¹⁴⁴

Ramanuja is the first, ever, to challenge Sankara's non-dualism. Ramanuja's strong emphasis on *bhakti* is a powerful criticism of the radical monism of Sankara, and his philosophy is regarded as Qualified Monism. He reversed Sankara's philosophy of priority of three tenets –a) the ultimate reality is the impersonal *nirguna Brahman* identical with individual *atman*; b) salvation is identity with *Brahman* by intellectual philosophical perfection; and c) recognition of this identity is by spiritual knowledge or insight. Ramanuja's counterparts to these three were: a) the supreme reality is the loving, compassionate personal God, who is distinct from the individual soul; b) liberation is by God's grace when it becomes one with God yet separate enough to realize the bliss of union with the godhead; and c) liberation is attained by personal devotion, not knowledge *per se*. In other words, Ramanuja's system is one of eternal paradox between the supreme Reality which is God and the human individual. *Advaita* is metaphysical idealism, and

¹⁴⁴ David Burnett, *The Spirit of Hinduism: a Christian Perspective on Hinduism*, (London: Monarch, 1992), 184-88.

Visishtadvaita is supreme realism of moving toward God through *bhakti*: the ideal pathway of life.¹⁴⁵

Ramanuja's first metaphysical tenet is the same as *Sankhya* but with some very fundamental differences. The conception of a single primordial unmanifested material principle is there. The main stages of the evolution of *mahat* and *ahamkara* are the same as in *Sankhya*. There is no hint of the atomic cosmology of Buddhism, Jainism or *Vaisesika*. The *tri-gunas* (*sattva*, *rajasa* and *tamasa*) characterize *prakriti*. Ramanuja makes magnificent use of the *gunas* in his ethical and spiritual instruction. His gloss on the *Gita* (7.13-14) emphatically rejects any idea of illusion (*maya*), because, for him, Nature is real, and '*maya*' is the immense and wonderful productivity of Nature in God's hands as God's body as it were. *Prakriti* is an ontological verity, not a mere phenomenological presentation (naturalism); "this *prakriti* divided eight-fold is mine" (7.4) is the focal point. *Prakriti*, one with God, is immanence and *vibhuti* or the wonderful glory of God (*Gita*, chapter 10). Besides, even all of Nature and all the *jivas* (the lower and higher *prakriti*), together do not exhaust God. They are only a fraction of God, and immortal. According to Ramanuja applies the philosophy of Nature (*vibhuti*) eliminates three errors: that Nature is illusion; naturalistic denial of supra-cosmic ground of Nature; and uncritical shallow pantheism, which are essentially forms of atheism (10.42).¹⁴⁶

For Ramanuja, *bhakti* is supreme while Advaitic impersonal knowledge of *Brahman* is considered to be imperfect. Hence, 'Liberation' in Ramanuja, means something completely different from the 'Salvation' in the *Advaita*. Salvation is by knowledge; but

¹⁴⁵ M. Narasimhachari, "The Visishtadvaita Philosophy" in *Perspectives of Theism and Absolutism*, ed. T. N. Ganapathy (Madras: Vivekananda College, 1978) 13; and S. S. Raghavachar, "The *Gita* According to Ramanuja," in *Gita Samiksa*, (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1971), 13-14.

¹⁴⁶ S. S. Raghavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, in *Gita Samiksa*, 16.

liberation is from human sin, from human predicament due to sin, from bondage to the world, and from *karmic* results of the past. Ramanuja postulates that the saving power of *bhakti* is a response to divine grace, and that *bhakti* can only become effective through the practice of meditation on the divine person.

Ramanuja admitted Sankara's salvation by knowledge, but declared that those saved by knowledge would find a state of bliss that is inferior to the highest bliss by *bhakti*. The best means of salvation is *bhakti*, and the best *yoga* is *bhakti-yoga*; the worshipper is but a fragment of God, and wholly dependent on him. The three-fold implication of divine immanence in the *jiva* is that it furnishes the *jiva* his or her support, controller and the source: the *jiva* is but a fragment of God's 'given share,' *amsa* (15.7; 11.18).

Ramanuja believes in the divine nature of the soul and its alienation from God in the earthly life. When the soul discovers the truth about God, as it walks towards union with God, there is great joy in the soul. Although the highest state of bliss is permanent union with God, there must always remain a small degree of individual self-consciousness.

In the *bhakti* tradition, an alternative factor integral to *bhakti* is *prapatti*, which is a fundamental part of the message of the *Gita*. Ramanuja cites the *Gita* (18.62), which is very clear about it. *Prapatti* signifies abandonment of self for refuge (*saranagati-tattvam*), surrendering one's soul completely in the hands of God with all one's being and love' (*sarva-bhavana*), trusting in God's will, and waiting confidently to attain supreme-peace-and-eternal-abode (*param-santi-sthanam*) by God's grace (*tat prasadat*).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Radhakrishnan agrees with Zaehner that 'fleeing' (seeking refuge) must be 'with all one's being,' and explicates 18.62 in the Advaitic way, that we must grow conscious of the 'Divine' on all the planes of our being from the spiritual to the physical:

Christ too says that the First Commandment is that we love God 'with all our heart, strength and our being' and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12.30-31) - as God commanded by the same words

Complete surrender (*prapatti*) excludes *karma yoga* including all practices, and *jnana yoga* including *dhyana* of the *Upanishads*, and a combination of both *jnana yoga* and *karma yoga* (action-knowledge-complex known as *samuccaya*) practiced in his time, as these were not exclusive means for release. On the basis of 11.48, 53-54 he believed *prapatti* alone was sufficient, for one cannot see God by the *Vedas*, sacrifice, study, alms, rituals or grim ascetic practices but only by loving devotion addressed to God, none other; only *bhaktas* can know God as He is and enter into Him.¹⁴⁸

Although Ramanuja had inherited a long and rich tradition of *prapatti* and practiced it, he did not stress it but only hinted at it in his polemical commentaries; Raghavachar reasons, perhaps, because he addressed such works only to those who stressed on *karma*, *jnana*, or a combination (*samuccaya*) of *karma-jnana* for release. Nevertheless, later on, the Madhva School completely ruled out everything (*jnana-karma-sannyasa-dhyana*) other than *prapatti*.¹⁴⁹ This is similar to the German reformer, Martin Luther insisting that people need not strive to reach God: salvation is free, for it is not by works but by God's grace alone through faith alone we are saved. The Catholics equally believed in salvation by Christ; but they made good works parallel faith and laid stress on the merit of good works.¹⁵⁰

through Moses in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6.4). This is a demand to 'keep up' the covenant relationship of reciprocal passionate love between God and the human being.

Arjuna is called upon to 'co-operate' with God and do his duty. He must change the 'whole orientation of his being.' He must put himself at the service of the Supreme. His illusion will then be dispelled, the bond of cause and consequence will be broken and he will attain shadowless light, perfect harmony and supreme blessedness.

I am the true vine and you are my branches. ...If you 'remain' in me and I in you, and you 'remain' in my love, and obey my commandments, whatever you ask in my name it will be granted to you (John 15. 5 - 9).

¹⁴⁸ M. Narasimhachari, *Perspectives of Theism*, 17-18.

¹⁴⁹ M. Narasimhachari, *Perspectives of Theism*, 16

¹⁵⁰ Tim Dowley, Ed., *History of Christianity*, (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1977), 370-72.

Ramanuja says that the whole discourse of Krishna in the *Gita* is for the resurrection of the spirit of Arjuna, who is a '*prapanna*' (a practitioner of *prapatti*). *Prapatti* generates *bhakti* when the *bhakta* is depressed for want of it; when *prapatti* is made part of *bhakti*, it confers on it completeness and makes it fully effective. Its entire meaning is prayerful and complete transfer of spiritual responsibilities to God in order that he will function in the abundance of his grace as the '*sadhana*' for the devotee's attainment of him. The culminating unit of teaching in 18.66, undoubtedly, is the essence of *bhakti*, viz., an exhortation to 'surrender.'¹⁵¹

For Ramanuja, God is a personal being, a God of grace, who is full of love for his creation who seeks to unite the human being with himself. He could even override the power of *karma* to draw repentant sinners to himself. This personal and compassionate God is quite different from Sankara's impersonal World Soul (Divine), which made the illusory universe as a sort of sport (*lila*). But Ramanuja's God needs the human being as much as the human being needs God. Ramanuja thrusts this sense into *Gita* 7.18 to imply that just as a wise individual *jiva* cannot live without God, God too cannot live without the individual *jiva*.¹⁵²

Zaehner considers this as totally variant from the whole tone of the *Gita*. Hence this seems to me to be the important point of departure. A. L. Basham explains that the individual soul, made by God out of his own essence, returned to its maker and lived forever in full communion with him, but was always distinct. It was one with God but yet

¹⁵¹ S. S. Raghavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, 38-39. In *bhakti-yoga* '*sadhana*' is 'planned self-effort' or 'means' to go straight to the goal; in *Visishtadvaita* it is action and knowledge ultimately culminating in 'devotion'; the other accepted path is '*prapatti*.'

¹⁵² Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 251, n.

separate, and for this reason, the system of Ramanuja was called *Visishtadvaita* (qualified monism)

Ramanuja's Nature of God in the *Gita* ¹⁵³

The *Gita*'s crowning phase of metaphysics is the Nature of God. However, conspicuous that it does not offer any proof for His existence. Ramanuja says that the *Brahma-sutra* may discuss such proofs but since the *Gita* is revelation of God Himself to Arjuna, and speaks of saving knowledge, there is no need to offer proof for His existence. The self-revelation of God is the best proof, it discloses truth, dispels ignorance (18.72-73). Ramanuja's theology is not natural philosophy like Sankara's or Thomas Aquinas' based on reason but revealed theology based on faith (17.3).¹⁵⁴

When the self-revelation came in the form of a vision portrayed in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*, Arjuna could not see God because he had no vision of God until God graciously supplied him with divine eyes (*divya cakshu*). Ramanuja says that Arjuna did not have the fitness for the experience of God; it was brought to him as 'direct experience' (*pratiyaksha-avagamam*) by *bhakti*: this is a very significant epithet that the *Gita* gives to *bhakti* (9. 2). The experience given to Arjuna is considered to be veridical because it was established by two considerations: 1) it was not a mere novel empirical experience; a wishful recollection of something seen before, or an object out of a dream; 2) it was authentic because it was a whole comprehensive experience which made sense in an otherwise illogical situation: it was experiencing a combination of empirical multiplicities in a mystical situation, which brought sense, clearly and distinctly.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ J. A. B. Van Buitenen, *Ramanuja on the BhagavadGita* (S-Gravenhage: H. L. Smit's), 45-47: Who is the Supreme *Brahman*? (V.22; 28).

¹⁵⁴ S. S. Ragavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, *Gita Samiksha*, 22.

¹⁵⁵ S. S. Ragavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, *Gita Samiksha*, 23.

Arjuna was commanded to ‘behold’ (*pasya*) the multiplicity of the world integrated at a single point in the single supreme reality called God (11.7, 13): there is nothing other than God which surpasses Him. This is like Saint Anselm’s prayer,¹⁵⁶ “Now we believe you are something than which nothing greater can be thought.... for I do not seek to understand in order to believe; I believe in order to understand... for I also believe that unless I believe, I shall not understand.” Anselm comes to the conclusion that God cannot be understood not to exist. Those who already believe that God exists have a better understanding that God exists. According to Anselm, human beings are created to see God: obtain a vision of God through God’s own illumination whereby faith becomes unnecessary.¹⁵⁷

For Ramanuja, God is the highest reality and not a phenomenal or conditioned version of a higher Absolute *Brahman* as he is for Sankara, for example. *Akshara* (imperishable) spoken in the twelfth chapter (12.1) is the same as the *kshetrajna* (controller) of the thirteenth chapter (1-4; 12-18), and the fifteenth chapter (16-20) definitely places *Purushothama* (the Personal God, *Isvara*) above the *akshara* Brahman. Not only is the *akshara* Brahman surpassed, but *akshara* Brahman itself constitutes a power of God, the *para-prakriti* wielded by Him. Krishna appropriates the title *Uthama-*

¹⁵⁶ Saint Anselm’s (1033-1109) Classical Ontological Argument, in Michael Peterson et al, Ed. *Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178 79.

See Zaehner’s notes on p. 167 for *Gita* 3. 15: The ‘imperishable Brahman’: Sankara derives this as the ‘supreme Self,’ the ‘*akshara Brahman*’ or the *Veda*, but Ramanuja as ‘material Nature and the individual imperishable self, *jivatman*’ (both Nature and individual self are the body of God) the highest Brahman. See also Zaehner p. 258 for *Gita* 8.3, 21-22: In 8.3 the imperishable is the ‘highest *Brahman*’ in 8. 21-22 it is the Unmanifest beyond the Unmanifest, or the higher exalted ‘person’ who is clearly ‘God.’

Arjuna understands the ‘imperishable’ as ‘God’ in the theophany (11. 37-38) and later as the one who transcends both the ‘perishable’ and the ‘imperishable’ (15. 17, n, P. 366-67). Thus we see the “three *purushas*”: 1) the perishable individual self in bondage to material Nature, 2) the imperishable *Brahman* and 3) the imperishable Person (*purushothama*) above the imperishable *Brahman*.

¹⁵⁷ Saint Anselm’s Ontological Argument, *Philosophy of Religion*, 178 79.

purusha or *Purushothama*, the All-sublime, All-Highest-Self, who does not perish, sustains all the three worlds (15.17).. We have a summary of the *Gita*'s teaching of God's identity in Krishna's I Ams (9.18) and in Arjuna's words (10.12-14).¹⁵⁸ Krishna is often called *Yogesvara* in the *Gita*, and Ramanuja understands *yoga* in this context as wealth of divine attributes.¹⁵⁹

Ramanuja rages at the Advaitic saying that *nirguna-brahman* becomes *saguna-Isvara* out of compassion to the dull-witted, and calls it an aberration of Advaita, for *nirguna* cannot possibly harbor compassion, which is a true nature of Divinity. Compassionate self-disclosure and saving the devout in distress constitute the dynamic essence of the avatar. While Advaita takes metaphysical attributes such as self-existence, consciousness, joy (*sat-cit-ananda*), purity and infinity for granted, the *Gita* takes particular care to dwell on the love and compassion of God. Ramanuja projects the elements of beauty and the grace of God from the *visva-rupa* where the two eyes are the sun and the moon that symbolize dazzling grandeur (*pratap*) and the grace (*prasad*) of God (11.19): the love (*bhakti*) aspect pervades the entire text of the *Gita*.¹⁶⁰

The whole world belongs to God; Krishna tells Arjuna to see His sovereign skill-in-works; that He spins the world as the *moola-prakriti*; in Him subsist all beings, He does not subsist in them; his self sustains all beings and causes them to be-and-grow (9.4-5). Sankara glosses that Krishna is speaking of Self in its essence, while Ramanuja explains

¹⁵⁸ *Gita* 9.18: Krishna declares, "I am the way, sustainer, Lord, witness, true home, refuge, origin, dissolution and the stable state between, a treasure-house, the seed that does not pass away. : Arjuna praises that Krishna is the highest-*Brahman*, highest-home, abode of purity, divine, primeval, unborn eternal Person (10.12-14).

¹⁵⁹ S. S. Raghavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, 22-28.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Two of this paper which has a comprehensive study of the *Gita*'s verses on *bhakti* and its synonyms.

it is not because He contains them like water in a pot but because He maintains them in existence by His will (*sankalpa*)'. Much thought, at once subtle, far-reaching and profound is packed into these enigmatic words of the *Gita* and Ramanuja offers effective direction for their elucidation.¹⁶¹

Although stating that Ramanuja was not as brilliant a metaphysician as Sankara, Basham nevertheless avows that Indian religion perhaps owes more to Ramanuja than to his predecessor. The effect of his work lasted many centuries after him, and his ideas spread all over India, and were the starting-point of most of the devotional sects of later times. Two important reasons for this wide-spread, ripple effect were its universal appeal to people of all class and gender, and that his *bhashyas* on the *prasthan-trayi*, written to refute Sankara, could be read by *Sanskrit* scholars all over India.¹⁶² In the south, Ramanuja's disciples translated them into Tamil which the people came to cherish.

Saivism has a similar, but more elaborate, philosophy of God, salvation and *bhakti*. Saivite *bhakti* is abundant with the concepts of God's tender love of all; the *bhakta*'s love of God, and salvation by pure grace to all penitent sinners. Nonetheless, Saivism mostly remained within the Tamil country, except for Kashmir, for the reason that the Tamil Saivite sages wrote their songs and doctrines only in Tamil, unlike Ramanuja.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ S. S. Raghavachar, *Gita According to Ramanuja*, 22-27. 'Subsisting in God' is not an easy matter to understand. The contingent beings dwell in Him, and He in them, but not in the sense of drawing His being from them in the same way they do from Him. Their being and their subsisting in Him happen purely by His determination. This is called 'creative immanence' along with 'transcendent perfection' and 'self-sufficiency;' and it is immanence by 'inward choice' and 'no external necessity'.

¹⁶² Basham, *Wonder That Was India*, 335.

¹⁶³ Generally speaking, within the Tamil speaking country, Saivism is abundantly widespread, has numerous followers and magnificent temples while Vaishnavism has fewer people and smaller temples. Practically speaking, many Hindus worship both Siva and Vishnu, and have names such as Siva-Raman, or Hari-Haran combining Siva and Vishnu. Ramanuja intentionally chose to write his system in *Sanskrit* to challenge Sankara's which was in *Sanskrit*, and had spread easily among the Brahmin class.

As for questions about the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the will – (also debated in Christian theology), Ramanuja assumed that human beings were free to make their choices, but he never pursued the implications of the idea. His disciples, however, were sharply divided on this and brought about two schools of thought, the northern and the southern schools with an interesting analogy based on the monkey-cat-principle (*katcha-manti-nyaya*). In the monkey principle (*vada-kalai* or Northern School), the mother monkey carries its baby on its back or the belly but the baby has to cling to the mother as it is transported to the safe destination: the believer must do something to arrive safely at salvation. In the cat principle (*'then-kalai'* or Southern School), the mother carries the kitten by the scruff of the neck, and the baby does nothing: salvation is merely by the grace and will of God.¹⁶⁴

Ramanuja's reformation is an unfinished attempt. Much to his credit, he propounded a revolutionary idea of removing castes on the basis of the *Gita*. But his followers, men of high intellectual caliber such as Vedanta Desika and Pillai Lokacharya, did not carry forward Ramanuja's humanistic aspect but made the religion more rigid in terms of orthodoxy and observance of caste system. Sankara and Vedanta Desika are examples of this sort of woodenness. To expect any one to abolish caste hierarchy in those days would be futile. Not even the Buddha, Ramanuja, Guru Nanak or Gandhi could accomplish it. It has grown much stronger with time. Castes multiplied like insects and plagued the Indian society.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Basham, *Wonder That Was India*, 331-38.

¹⁶⁵ Kandadai Seshadri, Sri Vaishnavism and Social Change, in *The Unfinished Reformation* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & co., 1998), 124-153.

CHAPTER 3. 2

BHAKTI IN MODERN TIMES: TWO MODERN COMMENTATORS OF THE *GITA*

We will now examine two modern Indian commentators of the *Gita*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi who were two of the towering 'socio-political-religious figures of the last two centuries, who emphasize two different aspects of 'devotional action' of the *Gita*. Despite differences and disagreements regarding beliefs and methods, both were men of ceaseless activity, who worked to rebuild India with an emphasis on social action. Historian, K. M. Panikkar writes,

The leaders of the Hindu renaissance re-discovered the *Gita* not only as the kernel of Indian religion and philosophy, but also as the political and social gospel of Hindu India: *Gita's* bold synthesis of philosophy and religion has reconciled the claims of the head and heart.¹⁶⁶

3.2. A

LOKAMANYA BALGANGADHAR TILAK (1856 -1920)

Tilak is called the Father of the Indian unrest and maker of modern India by D. V. Tahmankar¹⁶⁷ in his authorized biography of Tilak. In this paper, and with due respect,

¹⁶⁶ K. M. Panikkar, *The Foundations of New India*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), 36.

¹⁶⁷ D. V. Tahmankar, *Tilak: Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India*, (London: 1956) in his 'authorized biography of Tilak, calls him Tilak is called the "Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India"

we will refer to him simply as Tilak. Long overshadowed by his younger contemporary, M. K. Gandhi, his life and thought are now receiving due recognition a century after his death in 1920. As a freedom-fighter, and as leader of the Nationalist wing of the Congress Party, Tilak's emphasis was on social action rather than devotional action; he reinterpreted the *Gita* as a philosophy of activism rather than quietism.

Tilak is remembered, by his monumental commentary on the *Gita*, *Srimad BhagavadGita-Rahasya or Karma-Yoga-Sastra*,¹⁶⁸ or in short, the *Gita-Rahasya*, which means the 'Secret of the *Gita*.' Ever since the publication of the *Gita-Rahasya* in 1915, the *BhagavadGita* became the focus of Indian thinking and opened a new path for many other national leaders. It is a lengthy commentary, written in *Marathi*, within the four winter months of 1910-11 from his prison cell in Mandalay (Burma); he was serving a six year sentence of hard labor for inciting the Indian people against the British Raj. His younger contemporary, Mahatma Gandhi, although in disagreement with certain aspects of Tilak's *Gita-Rahasya*, still characterized it as a masterwork unsurpassed, and will remain so for a long time to come.¹⁶⁹

Tilak was searching for an authoritative, popular religious literary tool that would induce Indians to do their duty; and he found all that in the *Gita*, a sacred Hindu scripture with a philosophy that stressed *karma yoga*, insisting passionately upon the warrior's duty to fight. He needed a philosophy of activism to bring Hinduism out of its ancient

¹⁶⁸ B. G. Tilak, *Srimad BhagavadGita-Rahasya or karma-yoga-sastra* (Poona: Tilak Brothers Publications, 1915). '*Gita Rahasya*' means secret or esoteric teaching of the *Gita*. It was written in Marathi and went through several editions before it was translated into Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Kanarese, Telugu, Tamil, and English. The English edition is a translation by D. S. Sukthaankar, (Poona: Tilak Brothers, 1935, 2 Vol.). Tilak was recognized as an able *Sanskritist* by both Indian and Western scholars. The *Gita-Rahasya* was seized by the British and returned after a Government Marathi expert had examined it carefully and declared it as free of seditious passages.

¹⁶⁹ D. Mackenzie Brown, The Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak: Karma vs. Jnana in *Gita Rahasya*, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Feb. 1958), 197-206, (198).

books and meditations, and to rouse the Indian intelligentsia into social and political action, and to combat against the hold of western ideologies on Indian thinking. The *Gita* was the best choice.

However, Tilak's immediate and serious problem was Sankara's orthodox commentary of Advaitic teaching of renunciation which is against action (*karma*): while actions are helpful to human beings seeking perfection, they must be renounced once that perfection is achieved. Sankara goes on to say that, "even *dharma* (duty) is a sin in the case of him who wishes liberation."¹⁷⁰ Though Tilak concedes Sankara to be superman and a great sage, he accuses Sankara's remarks about the *Gita* in his commentary (*BhagavadGita-Bhashya*) of being a mere show of admiration or belittling the *Gita's* statements as energism; he calls Sankara's advice of renunciation of action in the *kali-yuga* (the present epoch) a queer idea.^{171 172} In contrast, Tilak asserts that the *Gita's* philosophy is precisely one of action and not renunciation, and he argues that social and political action is the duty of all citizens when a nation is threatened by internal decay or political oppression.

Tilak thinks the practice of renunciation allowed by the *Vedic Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* is an anachronism in the modern age, because action (*karma*) had already been justified by the *Vedas*.¹⁷³ He finds the *Upanishads* of the pre-epic India responsible for the emphasis on knowledge and renunciation over action, and for looking upon the *Vedic samhitas* and *brahmanas* as inferior to the *Upanishads*.¹⁷⁴ He calls it the genius of

¹⁷⁰ Srimad Sankaracharya, *BhagavadGita-Bhashya*, Tr. A. G. Krishna Warriar, (Madras: Ramakrishna Matt, 1996), 220: V1. 3; 157; 1V. 21.

¹⁷¹ Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 1, 18, 20.

¹⁷² Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 1, 510 - 511.

¹⁷³ Rig Veda, (X, 151; 1X, 113; 11, 12): path of action is essential, not the path of renunciation.

¹⁷⁴ Mandukya *Upanishad* 1, 2, 10: recommends the equitable state where both friend and foe are seen alike.

the *Gita* that has reconciled the 'Activism' of the *Vedas* and the 'Quietism' of the *Upanishads*, and praises Ramanuja who teaches, that even the perfected man must do *karma-yoga*.^{175,176}

Nonetheless, a problem remains for him, because the *Gita* refers to Arjuna's *karma-yoga* as caste duty, not public welfare. So the question is how *kshatriya* duty can be applicable to the other castes, viz., *Brahmins*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*, or to all the patriots of India to fight against a foreign rule that was disintegrating the Indian society? By caste, Tilak was a Brahmin. Another problem he faced with the *Gita* was that its *karma-yoga* was devoted to self-realization through service to others: How can he use the *Gita*'s *sattvika* (intelligence and goodness) to justify political action? How can India renounce action in the face of slavery or fight a responsible war without causing anarchy?

Tilak sums up his position in two statements in his *Gita-Rahasya*: (1) "Our religious texts have clearly stated that in the *kali-yuga*, that is, after the date of the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas*, the path of renunciation is prohibited (*Gita-Rahasya* 11, 701); and (2) "It is clear that in any country whatsoever, the persons who wield the destinies of the country must be supporters of the Path of Action (*Gita-Rahasya* 11, 700; *Gita*, 11.33; 18. 48).¹⁷⁷

Tilak does not approve of either total renunciation of action or pacifist behavior of the Indian leaders with the British officials, or gradual social reform to gain independence at a later time, or performance of minor liberal reformatations at this critical time.

For Tilak, the exemplar is the brilliant Maratha chief, Sivaji of Pune (1627-80), who fought against the *Mughals*, especially Afzul Khan, without desiring the fruit of his deeds

¹⁷⁵ Ramanuja, *Gitabhashya*, XV111. 48: One is born with action; one must not neglect established action; action is easier than renunciation or knowledge; all undertakings, whether of action or knowledge, are surrounded by evil and pain anyway.

¹⁷⁶ Mackenzie Brown, *Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on Karma vs. Jnana in Gita Rahasya*, 197-206.

¹⁷⁷ Mackenzie Brown, "Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, 202 - 203.

except that of saving the Maratha Country. Tilak advises compatriots to first enter into the high atmosphere of the *BhagavadGita*, and then consider the action of great men like Sivaji, and the present situation in India - for the context compels action (18.59) – as it did for Arjuna. As each of the three paths, *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti* has its place under a particular context, the *Gita's karma yoga* is supremely suitable for the present context. Tilak's emphasis is on social action for public welfare rather than devotional action (*bhakti*) for individual salvation. Let me close this section on Bal Gangadhar Tilak with an assessment of Tilak by Mackenzie Brown:

Tilak was correct in insisting that the doctrine of action is an ancient one in India and that European energism is not the only theoretical foundation available for leadership in the new India. None went so far and so consistently as Tilak in using the *Gita* as the philosophical basis of universal action. His profound analysis of the *Gita*, although doubtless not free from emotional bias (for Tilak was a man of passionate convictions), served to underwrite and rationalize the vigor of the later Indian Nationalist movement and the Gandhian program.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Mackenzie Brown, *Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, 203.

Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83) founder of the militant Arya Samaj summed up his own credo, 'God is one, and the *Vedas* are His word'; therefore Dayananda refused to recognize the authority of the *Gita* and limited the scriptural sources of his movement to the *Vedas*. Vivekananda (1862-1902) seems to support the viewpoint of Sankara although he stresses the severe necessity of action for almost all Indians in this day and age, except for those rare few who might be qualified for *moksha*, or liberation, action should be renounced. Aurobindo (1872-1950) gives more scholarly attention to the *Gita* than any other contemporary leader with the exception of Tilak himself. Like Ramanuja, Aurobindo places devotion at the top of the three paths of conduct, but insists that the *Gita* is a synthesis of all the three (202).

3. 2. B

MAHATMA GANDHI (1869-1948)

Tilak's mantle fell on Mahatma Gandhi. It is symbolic that Gandhi began his all-out attack upon the British Imperial rule by inaugurating the national non-cooperation movement, by coincidence, on the day of Tilak's death, August 1, 1920: he mourned, "My strongest bulwark is gone," although G. K. Gokhale, the moderate leader was Gandhi's political *guru*. When Gandhi entered the Congress Council four years earlier, he used the *Gita* to promote a mass program of restive action towards *swaraj* (self-rule), which demanded participation by *Brahmin* and *Sudra* alike.

Coming from Gujarat on the western side of peninsular India, the home of the Vedist Dayananda and the Jains, Gandhi clung to the old *Vaishnava* and *Jaina* traditions, which influenced him deeply. He disagreed with Rabindranath Tagore on several points: in the diagnoses of India's ills and the prescriptions for cure. But it seems to be Tagore¹⁷⁹ who addressed Gandhi for the first time as '*Mahatma*' (Great Soul) when he visited Shantiniketan in 1915. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, who admired

¹⁷⁹ Tagore (1861-1941) was a westernized Indian from the cosmopolitan city of Calcutta, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for the collection of his poems, "*Gitanjali*" (Song Offerings) published in Bengali in 1912 and translated by him later: in the eyes of the west he had vindicated the Indian culture. He had already founded the '*Shantiniketan* School' at a rural setting near Calcutta, to develop creative and performing arts of India, and later in 1921 opened in the same place the '*Vishva-Bharati* University' for world brotherhood and cultural interchange.

both Gandhi and Tagore, says that both were 'wholly India' at the same time, complementing each other representing different but harmonious aspects of India.¹⁸⁰

Gandhi wrote his Commentary on the *Gita* in Gujarati, so that the ordinary person could read it easily in his own language and understand it. His close friend in the freedom-struggle, Mahadev Desai, rendered it in English, with his own bias which Gandhi approved of, and published it in 1946 as "*The Gita According to Gandhi* or *The Gospel of Selfless Action*," just two years before India achieved its Independence.

Of all the nationalist leaders, Gandhi comes closest to accepting *karma yoga* as the essence of the *Gita*, although in Tilak's exclusive sense. Gandhi believed that action as *yajna* (sacrifice) is necessary for all persons, and *moksha* is to be achieved in our time by bodily activity for the service of the world.¹⁸¹ Gandhi differed sharply from Tilak about the attitude of the *Gita* towards violence, as Mahadev Desai puts it, for Gandhi non-violence is incidental to the main problem of action versus non-action.¹⁸² However, Gandhi and Tilak agree to see the *Gita* in different settings.

Gandhi first learned about the *Gita* from his English friends when he was a student of law in England, through Mathew Arnold's translation of it in English. He considered it priceless. Like a mother, he said later on, it had never failed him whenever he found himself in difficulty or distress.

People debated whether the *Mahatma* was an *Advaitin* or a *Visishtadvaitin*. The *Advaitins* believe only in the One formless, undefinable *Brahman* (also called *Atman*),

¹⁸⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (London: Meridian, 1947), 342-43. Tagore, the aristocratic artist, turned democrat with proletarian sympathies essentially represented the cultural tradition of India. Gandhi, a man of the people, the embodiment of the Indian peasant, represented another tradition of India, that of renunciation and asceticism: Tagore, a man of thought, Gandhi a man of ceaseless activity.

¹⁸¹ Mahadev Desai, *Gita According to Gandhi* or *The Gospel of Selfless Action* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1946), 130. Desai was Gandhi's secretary, adviser, and chronicler for twenty-four years.

¹⁸² Mahadev Desai, *Gita According to Gandhi*, 132-33: *Ahimsa*

and the *Visishtadvaitins* acknowledge the existence of a God, who is *Param-Atman*, or 'ultimate reality' to whom one and all will have to yield in complete surrender. Gandhi himself never revealed which philosophy he leaned to more. His belief, 'Truth is God,' pays allegiance to both Brahmanism and theism. He was a free-thinker and a genuine Hindu although he had deep respect for the tenets and doctrines of other religions including Christianity. He said what the Sermon-on-the-Mount gave graphically, the *Gita* presented to him as a formula.¹⁸³

The greatest single message that Gandhi derives from the *Gita* is the doctrine of *ahimsa* (non-violence), and the next was *ahimsa* combined with *satya* (truth), inseparable like the two sides of a coin. *Ahimsa* is primarily a Buddhist principle which the *Gita* has absorbed into itself. *Ahimsa* is the means and *satya* the end, or the other way round. Although the *Gita* does not talk about *ahimsa* as such in detail, Gandhi eked out connotations from the contexts, as in any poetry. Gandhi derives the *Gita*'s contribution of nuances, implications and undertones of *ahimsa* by reading and re-reading it with care. *Ahimsa* is the cream he obtains from the churning of 'desirableness in action'. He commends *ahimsa* to be one's supreme duty, and believes that renunciation of fruits of action can alone lead to self-realization and *moksha*. For him, renunciation is the sun around which *bhakti* and *jnana* and the rest revolve like planets.¹⁸⁴ He taught eleven *Gita*-values in his ashrams, schools and prayer meetings: non-violence, truth, non-attachment, non-possession, not merely non-stealing but not possessing more than what you need,

¹⁸³ K. Chandrasekaran, *Gita as Interpreted by Mahatma Gandhi*, in 'Gita Samiksha Conference' by the Department of *Sanskrit* of the Venkatesvara University, Tirupati, India, in March 1970, 154. Here Chandrasekaran quotes from Gandhi's column in the weekly news paper, "Young India," (22-12-1927).

¹⁸⁴ Chandrasekaran, *Gita as Interpreted by Mahatma Gandhi*, 155.

celibacy, action, fearlessness, universal uplift and responsible trusteeship etc.¹⁸⁵ Gandhi saw the evil of untouchability and caste distinctions:

There is an ineffaceable blot (untouchability) that Hinduism carries with it,... It is to my mind a curse that has come to us. And so long as that curse (cruelty) remains with us, so long we are bound to consider that every affliction in this sacred land is a proper punishment for the indelible crime that we are committing.¹⁸⁶

Though he fought against untouchability, he did not go far enough to eradicate it. What prevented him, I wonder.

Gandhi firmly believed that the *Gita* contains the gospel of service, and insists, that the people should learn this from a very early age: so he advised the students of Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, to read the *Gita* everyday early in the morning (4 am) either in *Sanskrit* or in Tamil but not in English because the English rendering could not impart the true significance of the *Gita* (25 Oct. 1927). His favorite text for students were 2.55-72 on *sthita-prajna* or steady wisdom, and 3.5-6, that man is made for work: for no one can stand still even for a moment without doing any work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature. He who restrains his organs of action but continues in his mind to brood over the objects of sense, whose nature is deluded, is said to be a hypocrite, (a man of false conduct).

Devotion (*bhakti*) occupies an equally important place in Gandhi's outlook in general. His 'devotee' (*bhakta*) is the same as the 'integrated' (*yukta*), the 'ideal man' and

¹⁸⁵ Raghavan Iyer, "Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi" (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10, 160.

¹⁸⁶ M. K. Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: an anthology of writings on his life, work and ideas*, Ed., Louis Fischer (New York: Random House, 1962), 41, 132-37; 251-57; 219-220; 251-57; 300

the individual with *sthitaprajna* (steady wisdom) of *Gita* 2. 56- 65, whom Zaehner calls the 'athlete of the spirit,' the devotee (*bhakta*) or the fully integrated person.¹⁸⁷

He compares his task of *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) to a holy war. He calls it a happy augury, as a telegram from a friend said, that this book (his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*) was being published at the right time, when his own holy war is entering its last phase, like Arjuna's in *Kurukshetra*.¹⁸⁸

A true *bhakta* is also a *jnani*, a *jivan-mukta* (attains *mukti* while still alive), the Perfect Man (2.56-58), whom Gandhi compares to water that ascends high as water vapor, becomes cloud and descends as drops of rain to fructify the earth (3.14).

Gandhi believes that the *Gita* had a message, distinct from the earlier scriptures, that it came down to deliver humanity. Gandhi is impatient with critics who accused him of introducing religion into politics, for that is what the Lord had exhorted every individual: to infuse every act of his with a sense of devotion to God, leaving always the results to God's special consideration (10. 10). Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice or give away in alms, whatever penance you may perform, offer it to Me" (9. 27).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ The *Gita*'s integrated person is the Perfect Man, One who is not jealous of any one, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is well-versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good and bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason; such devotion is inconsistent with existence at the same time of strong attachments.' (2. 56- 65)

Mahadev Desai, *Gita According to Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1953), 129.

¹⁸⁸ Raghavan Ayer, *Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ St. Paul's letter to the Colossians 3: 17 is similar: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, the Father, through him."

Whatever you do, of this verse, Zaehner renders as whatever *karma* (work) you perform. The *Vedic* sacrifices were *kriya* (work, actions) done with appropriate fruits in mind: the gods will give me something in return, i.e., sons, prosperity or victory over enemies, as cited in the early chapters of the *Gita* (3. 11). But the *Gita* supersedes this kind of sacrifice, and drums into the ear, actions must be done disinterestedly, if they should not lead one to future births. Action and self-sacrifice are duty to God, and both belong to goodness (17. 11).¹⁹⁰

Gandhi is an exemplar of the fully integrated man, the flame without a flicker (*Gita* 6.18), till his very end: he had finished his last fasting and prayer for Hindu-Muslim unity just two days before he was shot dead by the bullets of the assassin, Nathuram Godse, on January 30, 1948. He fell with a murmur, “Oh, God” (“*he*, Ram”). Nathuram was a *Brahmin* in his thirties, the editor of a *Hindu Mahasabha* weekly in Poona, with extreme Hindu beliefs – India for Hindus alone; no place for Hindu-Muslim and India-Pakistan unity. Louis Fischer calls his death Gandhi’s last victory.¹⁹¹ Prime Minister Nehru conveyed the news of the loss to the country by radio, “The light has gone out of our lives ...but the light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine for more years, and a thousand years later it will still be seen in this country and the world will see it ”

It suffices to conclude that Gandhi displayed an amalgamation of the three *gunas* and the three *yogas* of the *Gita* in his life: as a *sattvika-jnana-yogi*-statesman, a brave-*rajasa-*

¹⁹⁰ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 283: 9. 27, n.

¹⁹¹ Louis Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi: an anthology of his writings, life, work and ideas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 367-69.

karma-yogi-freedom-fighter, and a renouncing-*bhakti-yogi-half-naked-Vaisya-Harijan* – seeking *moksha* by performance (work).

Next we will see some of the critiques by four modern interpreters of the *Gita*.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL VIEWS OF FOUR *GITA* INTERPRETERS

4.1 A. J. Appasamy

According to Bishop Appasamy, the polytheistic faith of the *Rig Veda* (1200-800 BCE) had tended to develop in the direction of Monotheism.^{192, 193} After the exit of the flamboyant Aryan God, Indra, the moral God, Varuna, recedes and disappears after a moment or two of popularity.¹⁹⁴ In two of the *Upanishads*, the *Katha* and the *Svetasvatara*, the theistic view received further significant development. In the *Katha*, the bodiless God is immanent in all bodies as the inner controller of everything – as the essence of Fire, Air and the Sun - and yet different from each of them; there is no evil in Him. *Katha* 2.23 (which is exactly the same as *Mundaka* 3.23) teaches that not intellect or knowledge but Self [whose grace] alone can reveal His own person. The late *Upanishad Svetasvatara* contains the fullest expression of theistic belief to be found in the *Upanishads*. God is concealed in the worlds as fire in wood and ghee in butter; and like a spider covers Himself with threads produced from primary matter according to His own nature....*Vedic* sacrifice and corporate rituals are replaced by worship and personal experience, and the priest is substituted by the spiritual teacher, the *Guru*, who would

¹⁹² A. J. Appasamy, *The BhagavadGita*, in *Gita Samiksa* (Tirupati, Sri Venkateswara University, 1971), 121. This was his lecture at the Conference of *Gita* Scholars organized by the University.

¹⁹³ A. J. Appasamy, *The Theology of Hindu Bhakti* (Bangalore: Christian Literature Society, 1970). Bishop Appasamy wrote this book at the invitation of the Serampore Theological College's Library series as a challenge to the Christian theologians asking, "Is there anything that needs to be absorbed in the life and essence of world Christianity?"

¹⁹⁴ : "The moral god *Varuna* existing in prominence for a moment or two' is reminiscent of Nietzsche's words, : "Once upon a time,...when knowledge was invented in a star in a twinkling solar system... it was the most arrogant and mendacious minute in world history, but nevertheless, it was only a minute in F. W. Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Chapter X in *The Nietzsche Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 114.

manifest all his teachings to the *bhakta* (devotee) who will worship the *Guru* as God, presumably Siva (*Svetasvatara U* 6. 23). This is the first time in any *Upanishad* that the term “*bhakti*” appears.¹⁹⁵

In the *Gita*, Appasamy says, Krishna is the soul of the world-unborn, without beginning and the mighty Lord of the world, and among men, he is undeluded and without sin: free, unbound, with benevolent attributes, ordering births and rebirths to human beings who are like mere puppets tied to a wheel (10.3; 9.7-10; 3.22-26; 18.61). And yet, his attitude to the world is controlled and inspired by love. The doctrine of God set forth in the *Gita* is consistent and belongs to the higher types of theism.¹⁹⁶

However, Appasamy finds two strands in the *Gita* which belong to its conception of God. In the first strand, Krishna accepts whatever paths people choose to approach to worship Him, or any other god, as if it is offered to Him, and reap the rewards of their choices, fruit of their works in this life or their final abodes, even though they are not the highest (4.11-12; 9.23-25). The second strand seems to indicate a monistic or pantheistic point of view (4.24; 7.8-10). Just like the Creator God *Prajapati* in the *Rig Veda*, Krishna alone is the offering as well as the oblation; it is God who offers it in the fire of God. Human beings realize the One God in His works and reach Him alone. He is presented as the Supreme Creator God with splendid attributes, *saguna*, and also as the Vedantic Supreme *nirguna Brahman*; the theistic and pantheistic doctrines, follow each other closely or loosely as if the two are not in conflict with each other (4.24 *Brahman*); 8.11 (*Advaitin*), 8.14-23 (God); 8.24 (*Brahman*).¹⁹⁷ Is this interweaving from Vyasa?

¹⁹⁵ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, in *Gita Samiksha*, 122.

¹⁹⁶ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, in *Gita Samiksha*, 125.

¹⁹⁷ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, in *Gita Samiksha* 126.

Appasamy asks, “Is the *Gita*, in essence, theistic or monistic? Why are these two diverse elements of reality brought together in it?” There are several explanations. Firstly, some say that the *Gita* is a poem and as its author is a poet, not a systematic thinker; his words swing according to his mood. However, Appasamy considers the author of the *Gita* to be a capable thinker and poet whose poetry has a unified scheme. Garbe’s explanation of this monistic-theistic confusion is that when Monism was becoming popular, a later editor may have used the *Gita*, an ancient sacred theistic literature, to interpolate the monistic passages into it. But it is hard to prove this convincingly.¹⁹⁸

Another explanation from Appasamy for the occurrence of theism and monism together in the *Gita* is that the author presents the contradicting ideas side by side: the three paths to *moksha*, the two approaches, theistic and monistic to reach both the personal God and the impersonal *Brahman*, without attempting to eliminating one of them or resolving the issue?¹⁹⁹ Rudolf Otto brings out an interesting explanation of a method called *samuccaya* (combination or summing up) that Sankaracharya uses with regard to *saguna* and *nirguna* Brahman. By use of this method, all confusion is removed and consistency prevails. “Nothing” is a term used for God by mystics in the superlative exaltation of the above all ‘something.’ When *nirgunatvam* (*paravidya*) is superior to *sagunatvam* (*aparavidya*) and the former does not deny the latter but the latter is taken into the former, by *samuccaya*, Sankara could pass between the two countless times until the distinction ceases. The significance of *samuccaya* is to assure the highest *Brahman* all the possible divine values of theism and include them in the conception of *Brahman*.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, in *Gita Samiksha* 127.

¹⁹⁹ Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (1932, New York: Oberlin College Publication, 1970) 110.

²⁰⁰ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, on Sankara’s method of *samuccaya* which combines both monism and theism into one (27).

Unlike a paradox, a contradiction cannot be logically reconciled; yet, Sankara uses *samuccaya* to combine two opposites into a positive where, again, Advaita stands out.

Appasamy agrees with Ramanuja's explanation that God is not the apparatus of offering, He is immanent in it. He is not the devotee who offers, but He is immanent in the devotee. The line between theism and pantheism is always thin. Appasamy concludes that the devotee who is full of God finds God in everything; he does not trouble to think out the logical implications of pantheism.²⁰¹ Ramanuja gives a consistent point of view by explaining all seemingly monistic passages in the *Gita* by maintaining that they are really meant to teach belief in an immanent God.²⁰²

For Appasamy, there is another question of even greater practical importance. If the *Gita* has had an unrivalled hold on the thought and devotion of the people of India, at least of the thinkers who had had access to *Sanskrit* learning, how does it happen that Theism has never become the dominant philosophy of India? The Bishop has a plausible answer. The *Gita* has failed to present a convincing case for Theism by accepting and allowing the worship of other gods. The *Gita* is satisfied in assigning secondary place to these lesser gods and pointing out that their worship would give only finite rewards of this world but not permanent *mukti*. Though the *Gita* does say that only those devotees who have *ananya bhakti* in Him alone (not on any other) will have the highest type of reward, Appasamy insists that this is not adequate to support Theism. No religion grows which compromises with lesser beings. Judaism's emphasis on faith in the Only Being, strict monotheism and rejection of idolatry, have had the greatest bearing on the

²⁰¹ Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*: prayer, communion, intimate relationship with God, and the immanence of God (128 -29).

²⁰² Appasamy, *BhagavadGita*, 129-130. The idea of an immanent, transcendent and incarnate God is in Christianity too.

continuance of the Hebrew religion in history. Moses' first two commandments, 'No other God' and 'No worship to any other God,' have successfully brought the attention of the nation to fix its gaze on the Holy One of Israel. The other two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, also do not tolerate apostasy and idolatry.

4.2 STEPHEN NIELL²⁰³

a) WHY DID THE *BHAKTI* RELIGIONS APPEAR WHEN THEY DID?

Stephen Neil reasons why the *bhakti* religions appeared at certain times and took hold of Indian minds with power. He ventures to make a general statement that *bhakti* seems to have been Hinduism's method of defence against other religious systems which threatened to eliminate all that is most characteristic of Hinduism which brings comfort and consolation to ordinary men and women, and that the timing points to the context at that time which needed the *bhakti* religion to come into being in India. What was the context? He explains as follows:

Hinduism was already old when Jainism and Buddhism appeared on the Indian scene. These two great systems may be interpreted as a reaction against Hinduism which had lost itself in endless speculations and no longer provided an answer to the increasingly burdensome problems of human existence. As Jainism and Buddhism spread rapidly throughout north India, they must have been felt as threats or a menace to the

²⁰³ Stephen Neill, *Bhakti of South India and the Bhakti of the Christian in Bhakti, Hindu and Christian* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974), 53-82.

established Hindu religion's orthodox ways. Something was to be done to hold off this growing menace. There is general consensus about this among modern scholars.²⁰⁴

Neill explains the situation further. The weaknesses of Buddhism is one of the reasons for the appearance of the *bhakti* religions in India. Buddhism is said to be a pessimistic religion of serenity although joy (*metta* or *muditta*) is one of its four basic principles (*brahma-viharas*). The monk, especially a more austere southern (*Theravada*) one has to renounce so much in life that makes human existence tolerable, and sweep away almost everything in religion which men cling to. The *bhakti* religions assured that the pilgrimage is not endless, that he who seeks will find Him, when all the illusions of existence will be dissolved in the coming of the experience of *Nirvana*. These must have been welcome alternatives to Buddhism's lack of God. There is God who can be worshipped; there are also liturgies and rituals that are popular, not impenetrable. The message of deliverance seemed attractive, not perplexing to the ordinary Buddhist householder too, who has to go on living in the world supporting the monks (*bikkus*). While on the side of Buddhist monks and the common people, there was a growing dissatisfaction with their own religion and a need for a change; on the side of Hinduism, allowing the development of the *bhakti* religions could be seen as the answer to save itself from the menace of Buddhism which was reigning supreme for over six hundred years from the time of the Buddha.²⁰⁵

The *BhagavadGita*, Neill states, is best understood as the culmination of a long process of development. It has a new and simple doctrine showing people how everyone from all walks of life can be religious and advance on the path to deliverance without

²⁰⁴ D. D. Kosambi, Historical Development of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, in Vol. 1, "*Studies in the History of Indian Philosophy*" (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1978), 243-266.

²⁰⁵ Stephen Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 54.

total renunciation of action in the world as Buddhism taught. *Bhakti* is, by any count, easier than the Upanishadic Hinduism that seemed to restrict redemption only to the few Brahmins who could withdraw from ordinary life to follow the path of knowledge (*jnana*). But the rest could not do this. All that the *Gita* required of them was to continue in the world and carry out the duties of their caste. Brahmanism that is not intended for them did not attract them, as a message of deliverance. The *Gita*, instead, said that everyone should perform their prescribed duty without expecting its fruit (*nish-kama-karma*); no one should simply stay away work-less (*nish-karma*) but rather consider their obligatory caste duty (*sva-karma*) their privileged duty (*kama-karma, sva-dharma*). A *Kshatriya*, like Arjuna, is taught to fight without hesitation or thought of the final outcome of his performance: Krishna says that he is not bound by work; he can come to the world of Krishna through devotion.^{206,207,208}

The change did come by way of *bhakti* after a long period of struggle. *Bhakti* could stand alone against both Hinduism and Buddhism: Hinduism's exclusivity of the minority highest class against the majority in the society, and Buddhism's harsh and total renunciation and aridity of practice of the faith. Krishna opened the door of *bhakti* and said that persons are not bound; all could come to the world of Krishna through devotion; salvation is for the low no less than the high.

²⁰⁶ Stephen Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 54: *Gita* (18. 66; 12.6-12: "Give up all things of law, turn to Me, your only refuge, [for] I will deliver you from all evils; have no care."

²⁰⁷ Stephen Neill, *Bhakti, Hindu and Christian*, 54 - 55.

²⁰⁸ Kosambi, Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavad-Gita, in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 4. No. 2 (Aug., 1961) 218-224: Kosambi develops a theory from an economic point of view that the *Gita* was written to revive the feudal system to bring more revenue by the impoverished peasants' loyal service to the politically powerful oligarchic capitalist upper class landlords. He fixes the time of the *Gita* as the early half of the Gupta Empire before it became rich and powerful; the *Gita* was written by the Brahmins for the Brahmins to safeguard their position by accepting the *bhakti* religion into the Brahmanic religion by synthesis - as the only way to survive.

b) Inconsistencies in the *Gita*:

Next Stephen Neill points out that the inconsistencies in the text of the *Gita* have led some scholars to question the unity of the work, which has been overlaid by the addition of elements expressing a more orthodox, Brahmanical point of view. He thinks this is possible because the works of other religions have also grown in exactly this fashion. The view that is held more generally today is that the *Gita* is a peaceful work, and the inconsistencies in it are, in reality, the intended part of the poem itself, that everyone should find what he/she needs in what the *Gita* has intended. Therefore, it is in fact, this flexibility and compromise of the doctrine of the *Gita* that has ensured its place over many centuries as the most popular of all Hindu classics.²⁰⁹ However, my question is, as to which is the intended part of the *Gita*, and which is not.

Neill's greatest Unanswered Question is why there is no uncompromised monotheism. This is the same question asked by Appasamy or any other serious reader of the *Gita*: Why did the *Gita* not make an assertion when it has reached a high level of personalist theism and a monotheistic understanding of religion? The *Gita*'s God is not a distant reality but the soul's closest friend and the end of all its desire, in which it experiences an all-embracing-unity. Having reached a high understanding of a living personal God who is accessible even to the least of the worshippers, and having experienced God through His own revelation of Himself, why did Hinduism not go for a strict monotheism?²¹⁰

It only shows that, for some reason, Neill says, this step has not been taken deliberately. Hinduism has always allowed itself to be divided between the impersonal and personal divinities, *Brahman* and God (Isvara). *Bhaktas*, who followed the mystic

²⁰⁹ Neill, *Bhakti, Hindu and Christian*, 53-82.

²¹⁰ Neill, *Bhakti, Hindu and Christian*, 56.

path; have been thought of as inferior and a little eccentric, whereas those who followed the orthodox Hinduism, which believes in a supreme impersonal reality that is beyond personality, were considered to be superior. This difference between the *bhakti* cults and the orthodox religions has made a deep divide between their followers too.²¹¹

c) Neill asks another question: Why is the Hindu religion in the south different from that in the north? Neill writes that the Hindu religion of the Dravidian South is different from that of the Aryan North because the Dravidians already had their own religion, *bhakti*, before the Aryans entered India. Nearly the whole of North India follows the Upanishadic *Brahmanism* conditioned by *advaita* of Sankaracharya as the supreme intellectual position, whereas in the South, the mystical or emotional oneness with the Supreme God has risen to the level of orthodoxy, and become the faith of the millions.

Bishop Neill, who had lived a lifetime in India and traveled all over the sub-continent and mingled with many groups of religious and ethnic people, thinks that it is this phenomenon of *bhakti*: the mystical, or emotional apprehension of oneness with the Supreme God that has become the faith of the millions in the south for many centuries. This makes the religions and people of south quite different from those of the north.²¹²

d) What made Hinduism not only withstand Buddhism and Jainism but also banish them?

In the five centuries (2 -7 AD), when the two atheistic religions were holding political power in South India, Hinduism not only withstood them, but also caused them both to disappear completely from the scene. The aridity of Buddhism and Jainism was hardly a

²¹¹ Stephen Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 57.

²¹² Stephen Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 57. Neill was Assistant Bishop of Oxford and lecturer at the Wycliffe College before he became the Anglican Bishop in South India. A scholar in Christian and other world religions and a thought-provoking writer, his books include *Crises of Belief*, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*; *Jesus Through Many Eyes*.

match against the ebullient Hindu *bhakti*. Besides, the *bhakti* movement on a large scale began in India with the Tamil mystics of the South (6th-14th century CE).²¹³ “This Tamil *bhakti* movement was an impassioned cry against the ossified ceremonial religion of the Brahmins and the ideal of passionlessness that these three religions shared.”^{214, 215} Several scholars attribute this powerful rising up of Hinduism in the south to the Tamil *bhakti* movement that was created by the ecstatic outpourings and the immense output of doctrines of the earlier generations of the Saivite *Nayanmars* and the Vaishnavite *Alvars*, which had met the spiritual needs of millions of people in the south.^{216, 217}

As sacrifices and rituals became rare in the north, mainly due to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism, and the Brahmin priests became redundant; they traveled south and found new patrons in the Tamil country of the Chola, Pandya, and Chera kings who took them in and allowed them to start their religious ceremonies and sacrifices. As a result, Brahmanism started to flourish better than in the north, and drove away Buddhism almost completely, rendering Jainism powerless and reduced in numbers. By Ramanuja’s time (12th century CE), the fourfold *Varnashrama-Dharma* had become more rampant than in the north, and stayed. Consequently, caste and color caused the failure of Ramanuja’s reforms. Nevertheless, in spite of all this, the Tamil country produced twelve well-respected *Alvars* and sixty-four revered *Nayanmars* from all the four castes.

²¹³ Robert S. Ellswood, *Bhakti Movement* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1955), 85-86. “*Bhakti* is a Spiritual Path of the early middle ages based on love for one’s chosen deity. The soul loses its egocentricity in love for the chosen God. These were the times of both social and devotional protest of the Hindu reaction to Buddhism. During this time the South Indian Hinduism was moving away from the *Vedic* Hinduism of sacrifices and castes.”

²¹⁴ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962), 171.

²¹⁵ H. W. Schomerus translated the Saiva Siddhanta Sastra into German, *Der Saiva Siddhanta*, (Leipzig, Lutheran Mission Publication, 1912). He was a Lutheran missionary in India.

²¹⁶ Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 62-63.

²¹⁷ Dhavamony, *Love of God*, 2-4.

4. 3 R. C. ZAEHNER

A. ZAEHNER ON PRIORITY OF *BHAKTI* IN THE *GITA*

Analyzing Chapter 12 of the *Gita*, Zaehner shows very clearly, that the *Gita* prioritizes the *bhakti* religion over Buddhism by absorbing the typically Buddhist virtues *metta* (friendliness), *karuna* (compassion), and abandonment of all thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ (self-denial), which are basic to all Buddhism and giving them their due place in its own theistic system (12.13), and yet asserting that the Buddhist *Nirvana* cannot be perfected unless and until the Buddhist accepts the existence of God and learns to love Him (12. 14).²¹⁸ The same Chapter emphasizes the priority of love in seven verses (14–20) by saying six times that God loves that man, and two times the reason for His love is that he is loyal-devoted and devout (12. 17, 19).

Although the *Gita* discusses a variety of doctrines: *Sankhya*, *Buddhism*, the *Upanishads*, *Vedanta* etc., it is clear that there is still a central core of teaching that is unmistakably genuine personalistic theism. Theism and *bhakti* become increasingly clear throughout the *Gita* and unmistakable in the end of the last chapter where Krishna confirms his love for Arjuna twice, “you are dear to Me” (18. 65 -66). Arjuna’s natural eyes, at human level, see his charioteer only as a personal friend; but when he is given a celestial eye (11. 8), and when the veil of ignorance, (*avidya*) before his eyes is removed, Arjuna sees Him as God and himself as His devotee. This is the intended message of the *Gita*: to reach the loving personal God through love (*bhakti*). Zaehner writes that as he grew increasingly familiar with this wonderful work,

²¹⁸ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 329, notes on 12. 13- 4.

It became insistently clear to me that here was a text the whole purpose of which seemed to me to demonstrate that love of a personal God, so far from being *only* a convenient preparation for the grand unitary experience of spiritual 'liberation' (the *moksha* or *mukti* of the *Upanishads* and the *vimutti* of the Buddhists) but was *also* the crown of this experience itself which, without it, must remain imperfect.²¹⁹

And yet, although Krishna becomes the manifestation of the One true divine reality, in it, the *Gita* is not monotheistic in the exclusive sense of the Old Testament or the Qurran.

a). ZAEHNER ABOUT THE *ADVAITINS*

Zaehner affirms that *bhakti's* personal relationship is denied by the *Advaitins*. Though every sect of Hinduism tries to make the *Gita* its own, many sects have openly attempted to eliminate or explain away this remarkable personal expression of *bhakti* and of the relationship of the *bhakta* to the Lord. The towering genius of Sankaracharya, the founder of the extreme school of *Vedanta's* non-dualism, and the greatest dialectician whom India has yet produced, has most authoritatively interpreted the *Gita* as an expression of his austere *advaita* philosophy, one without a second.²²⁰

His [Sankara's] *Gitabhashya* is full of keen argument; but not even the subtlety of a Sankara can conceal the fact that the *advaita* and the *Gita* systems are not at one.²²¹

Simply put, systems, such as *Advaita*, that do not take into account the personalist elements (theism) in the *Gita*, cannot reach an interpretation which will do justice to the *Gita's* deepest teachings.²²² However, some *Neo-Advaitins*, conditioned by Sankara, harmonize the *Gita* with the *Upanishads* and, at the same time, sustain the insights of Neill and Hill about the *advaita* while differing in details among themselves, in an effort to circumvent the *bhakti* part of the *Gita*.

²¹⁹ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 3.

²²⁰ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 3.

²²¹ Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 56. The quotation is from P. D. Hill.

²²² Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 56.

In his book, *Evolution in Religion*,²²³ Zaehner says that the *Neo-Vedantins* see *Vedanta* everywhere, and what is not reducible to *Vedanta*, they dismiss as irrelevant and unreal. The emphasis of the *Neo-Vedantin*, as it is of the *Vedanta* and also of higher religion in general, is on the individual not the society, nation, humanity, proletariat or the like. The search for the unity of the eternal timeless ground of the human self, *Atman* which is *Brahman* is often a tautology. Self-realization is the goal of life: conquest of death by passing through one's being beyond death and time. For the Vedantin, *Brahman* is pure Being and therefore unaffected by what goes on in life unlike the Christian God, the God of history. *Vedantin* 'liberation' is for individual, not for the community or the world. Overwhelmingly individualistic, Buddhism is similar to Vedantism but unlike Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.²²⁴

C. ZAEHNER ON THREE TYPES OF MYSTIC UNITY

Zaehner writes that there are three kinds of mysticism just as there are varieties of religious experiences: those types of mysticism that have love as the central phenomenon of the whole experience; those that disregard love altogether and express themselves as unity, liberation or escape from time, the phenomenal world and everything that conditions it; and thirdly, those that combine the aforesaid two positions because these sages have experienced both.

Some of the very few who have experienced the third kind of mysticism are the fourteenth century, Flemish monk Ruysbroeck, the Muslim mystic, Al-Junayd of Baghdad, and on the Hindu side, the author of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The latter not only

²²³ Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion*, 90-91.

²²⁴ Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion*, 91.

prepares one for the grand unitary experience of *moksha* of the *Upanishads* and *vimutti* of the Buddhists but demonstrates that love of the personal God is the culmination of this mystic experience without which both *moksha* and *vimutti* would be incomplete. The return of the soul to *Brahman* (*brahmi-sthithi*) or the Buddhist Nirvana is not the final stage or the exact expression of perfect deliverance; only union with Krishna is that final stage. So Krishna supplants *Brahman* both in theodicy and in cosmology and surpasses it (*Brahman*) in eschatology too. Thus the union with Krishna is the ultimate or final stage of deliverance. Zaehner is disappointed that many modern interpreters of the *Gita*, especially those influenced by Sankara, miss this important development emphasized by the *Gita*.²²⁵

Stephen Neill brings out another aspect of Zaehner's three mystical experiences: cosmic, inward and theistic. In cosmic mysticism, the human being feels at one with the whole universe, as in the monism of the *Upanishads*. In the mysticism of inward unity, all the different parts of the individual's own being have ceased to be out of tune with one another and have come together in one single unity. Here the *atman* within each of us, the inner self (*antar-atma*) or the inner dweller (*antar-yamin*) is often unrealized. However, theistic mysticism is where the separate soul feels itself as one with the ground of its own being; this ground is felt and known as a God who is love, and gives of His own bliss to the spirit which enters into complete fellowship with Him: *sat-cit-ananda*.²²⁶

²²⁵ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 2-3. Zaehner, in his *Evolution in Religion*, writes that the man who has been reborn in Christ, must grow into ever fuller being, must 'yield rich harvest.' For Christ is not only the still centre of the soul, the "*Brahmi sthiti*," the 'fixed, still state of Brahman, of which the *Gita* (2.72) speaks; he is also the 'power' and 'wisdom' of God (1 Corinthians, 1.24), the *sakti* and *jnana* of God.

²²⁶ Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 56.

This third mysticism, however, has two types: one where the experiencer feels himself absorbed into the great reality without any distinction between the 'I' and 'Thou,' and the other where the unity is of will and desire but there is yet a duality or difference present between the knower and the known (*kshetra-jna* and the *kshetra*) or God and the soul.²²⁷ In the *Gita*, we see both types of the third kind of mystical experience of *bhakti* which means God and the soul are the same and yet different simultaneously. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, the hidden treasure in the field is God; the 'knower' (*kshetrajna*) is the human being; knowing is discernment. The problem is that many are *a-kshetrajna* (*no-knower*); however, by the grace of God, the former *a-kshetranjas* become *kshetra-jna* of the field, sell all that they have and buy it with its immortal treasure.²²⁸

4. 4 HEINRICH ZIMMER: THE ARYAN HYPOTHESIS

It is Zimmer's contention that the heterodox systems represent the thinking of the *non-Aryan* peoples of India (the *Dravidians*), who were overcome and despised by the *Brahmins*, but who, nevertheless, could boast of subtle traditions of their own. Jainism is the oldest of the *non-Aryan* group going back to the pre-Aryan, so-called *Dravidian* period, which has been dramatically illuminated by the discovery of a series of great Late Stone-Age cities in the Indus Valley (Harappa, Mohenjodaro and others) dating from the third and perhaps even fourth millennium BCE. *Sankhya* and *Yoga* represented a later, psychological sophistication of the principles preserved in *Jainism*, and prepared the

²²⁷ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 2; Stephen Neill, *Bhakti: Hindu and Christian*, 56-57; and John Carman, *Majesty and Meekness*, Michigan: William Erdman's Publishing Company, 1994) 65-66.

²²⁸ Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion*, 98: (*Chandogya* U. 8.3; *Gita* 13. 1-4). The simile of the knower and known is used in a variety of ways as the field, treasure, Brahman etc. Finally, in the *Gita*, Krishna says for the first time (13.1- 2), 'He is the knower of the field,' the knowledge of this field, and of every field, and the 'true knowledge.' This is new: He is the 'knowledge of the true knowledge': *satyasya satya*. Matthew (13.44) has a similar simile of a man selling all that he had, with joy, to buy the field that had a hidden treasure.

ground for the forceful, anti-Brahmanical statement of the Buddha. *Sankhya* and *Yoga* belong together, as the theory and the practice of a single philosophy. Kapila (a brown man) was the reputed founder of *Sankhya*; Buddha was born in a town named after Kapila, Kapilavastu. In general, the *non-Aryan*, heterodox philosophies are not exclusive in the same sense as some of the *Brahman* philosophies are, for the former are not reserved to the three upper classes.²²⁹

It was in the paradoxes of the epoch-making *Gita* that the non-Brahmanical, pre-Aryan thought of the original *Dravidian* people of India became fruitfully combined and harmonized with the *Vedic* ideas of the Aryan invaders. The *Gita* reflects this kaleidoscopic interworking of the two traditions that had been contending for some ten centuries for control and mastery of the Indian mind.²³⁰

²²⁹ Heindrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1951), 60.

²³⁰ Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 378.

Chapter 5: MISUSE OF THE GITA FOR CASTE SYSTEM

5.1 CASTE SYSTEM UTILIZED THE GITA

5.2 THE GITA IS AGAINST CASTE

5.1 CASTE SYSTEM UTILIZED THE GITA

We have to start from the origin and development of castes to explain the problems of caste today. The strength of the Hindu society is structured around the backbone of caste. One's caste, social level and racial purity are inherited together at birth and remain fixed until death and continue into one's own next births and to one's posterity too - without any freedom to move up or down in the vertical hierarchy.^{231, 232} The system has not only flourished for centuries and filled the entire Hindu culture, but has also crept into the Christian and other non-Hindu cultures by conversion and marriage.

Most Westerners do not understand the distinction between a class-based and a caste-based society: that the former is only unsocial, but the latter is anti-social. Class is a euphemistic neutral term to hide the harsh offensive realities of caste. Anti-social attitude does not merely divide people into several groups according to color (*varna*) but obliges each group to have a different way of life (*varna-dharma*) that leads to isolation and anti-social tendencies and makes mutual cooperation not only difficult, but more often than not, impossible. The perpetrators of graded inferiority and inequality suppressed (and still

²³¹ Katti Padma Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture* (Chennai: The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1995), 45-46. In this Chapter on 'Abolition of Caste as a Principle,' Padma Rao discusses the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar: a brilliant Barrister, a Cabinet Minister in the first Indian Parliament after Independence, who wrote the 'Charter of the Indian Constitution.' Born of a low caste, he revolted against caste system, converted to Buddhism, and died soon after in a rather suspicious manner.

²³² Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), 280: Brahmanism in the last half of the first millennium resulted in a stagnation of at the 'developmental' level and in a fiercely hierarchical caste society that fixed the masses into unprecedented forms of exploitation.

suppress) discontent and hostility of the people against them with deterrent punishments. All this was done in order that the upper caste could keep its racial purity.

Historically, the caste system began only after the *Indo-Aryans* from Central Asia settled in India (c.1800 BCE) and divided the society into *Aryan* and *non-Aryan* races: those with color and those without color. Next, they graded the *Aryan* races into three upper castes, namely, the *Brahmin* at the top, *Kshatriya* in the middle and *Vaisya* third and all the original Indian races into the fourth, as the subordinate caste; in order to preserve their racial identity and purity, they used six powerful tools: the *Rig Veda*, the Law of *Manu*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the theory of *Karma*, marriage within the caste, and deterrent punishments which legitimized racial status and duties according to their castes.

TABLE: 3

The 42 identical verses in the <i>Rig Veda</i> , <i>Manu sastra</i> and <i>Gita</i> : see footnote below.			
	<i>Rig Veda</i> (c.1000 BCE)	<i>Gita</i> (c. 300 BCE)	<i>Manu</i> (c.100 CE)
Origin of the four castes from God	X. 90.12		
18. 47 1.31			
<i>svadharma</i> of the castes described	18. 41-48	1.92 -119	
Better [to do] one's own duty			
3.35;18.47 6.66;10.97			

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²³³ *Rig Veda* (X. 90. 12) is 'identical' with the *Gita* 3. 35; 18.47, *Manu Sastra* 1.31, and *Br. U*: 1.iv.15. They speak of *Purusha-sukta* or the purity of Man. *Rig Veda* (X. 90. 12) is the only verse in the whole of the *Rig-Veda* that enumerates the four castes by name and duty. When the primordial man, *purusha* was sacrificed by the gods, the *Brahmin* came from the mouth, the *Rajanya* from the arms, the *Vaisya* from the thighs and the *Sudra* from the feet: the above caste names distinguish their duties i.e., the priest, the ruler-fighter, agriculturist-trader, and the laborer respectively.

The obligatory duties of the four castes are stated 'broadly' in *Manu* 1.87-89 and 'explicitly' in *Manu* 1. 92-119, adding that "the Lord assigned only one activity to a servant: serving these (other) classes without resentment." The *Gita* (18. 41-48) describes the duties of the four castes assigned according to the constituents (*gunas*) and they are from the nature of things as they are – in *Manu*.

How and why did the exact verses of the *Manu sastra* (c.100 CE) appear in the *Rig Veda* as the only verse in it about castes (c.1100-1000 BCE), and in the *Gita* composed centuries (c.300 BCE–200 CE) earlier than *Manu 100 BCE*)?

Let us first quote Manu's verses:

From his mouth he created the priest, from his arms the ruler, from the thighs the commoner, and from the feet the servant. *Manu sastra* (1. 31)

One's own duty, (even) without any good qualities, is better than someone else's duty well done; for a man who makes his living by someone else's duty immediately falls from (his own) caste. *Manu sastra* (10. 97)

The famous Tenth Chapter of the *Rig Veda* (X. 90. 12) repeats Manu (1.131):

The Brahmin was his mouth, of both arms was the Rajanya made.
His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced.
Rig Veda (X. 90.12)

The Law book of *Manu* decreed, succinctly (1.87-1.91) and elaborately (1.92-1.117) that "Caste system is a division of society into four classes with certain social and religious rights and economic activities to each group" (1. 31; 6.66; 10.97). The *Brahmin*, mentioned first is born from the mouth of God (*purusha*), is in the top class of purity, to study and teach the *Veda*; the *Kshatriya* born from the arm is second class, should therefore protect society and access the *Veda*, while the *Vaisya*, coming third, from the thigh, is to farm, trade and access the *Veda*. However, the *Sudra*, born from the foot, was condemned as impure, to be the servant of the three upper castes, not

The *Gita* 3.35 and 18.47 are identical with *Manu* 6.66 and 10.97 "Better [to do] one's own [caste] duty though devoid of merit, than to do another's however well performed. By doing the work prescribed by his own nature a man meets with no defilement." (Please see the Table above.) *Gita* verses (2. 31-37; 4.13-14) are also about the fourfold caste system

Brahmin is different from *Brahman* the Absolute, and *Brammah*, the Creator male God: the *Brahmin* is the highest Aryan caste of priests.

to hear, read, recite or study the *Veda*, but always be the backward lower class. The *Gita* puts the onus upon the Absolute God Krishna, who declares triumphantly,

The four-caste system did I generate with the categories of ‘constituents’ and works; of this I am the doer, this know—[yet I am] the changeless One who does not do [or act] (4.13).

To *Brahmins*, princes, peasants-and-artisans, and serfs works have been variously assigned by these constituents, and they arise from the nature of things as they are (8.41).

We see a progressive insistence on caste duties in these eight verses (18. 41-48), where the *Gita* dictates the duties proper for the four classes, the *Brahmins*, princes, peasants-and-artisans, and serfs, in four verses (18. 42-45) to attain perfection and joy (18.46). What is new in 18.46 is that Krishna picks out the performance of caste duty as being perhaps the ‘only perfectly acceptable’ worship of Himself because He is the one source of the ancient social system, which divides men into the four classes as mentioned above (4.13). To do one’s duty (*sva-dharma*) in accordance with the state into which one is born is better than doing another’s duty (*para-dharma*), conforming to the will of God; therefore, it is imperative that you do what the ancients did in the days of old.²³⁴ Besides, [you, serfs], doing your proper duty is better because dirty work will not defile you.

This verse (18.47) is the maxim of the *Gita* which was laid down at a very early stage of the *Gita* (3.35); duty in one’s social station is equal to worship (9.27), which clarifies that doing your ‘desireless action’ (*nish-kama-karma*) is part of *karma yoga*; doing your own duty (*svakarma*) is your natural right or duty by birth (*sva-dharma*) whether it is void of merit or involves demerit; to avoid more deaths (cycles of *samsara*)

²³⁴ Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 394, n. Zaehner’s notes for 3.35 meticulously informs that the *Gita* rubs in this maxim again at the end of the discourse (18.47).

by dying within your own duty is better than 'doing another's well.'²³⁵ This was used by the elite leisure caste to justify permanent unpaid labor by the low caste feudal serfs.

Thus, the *karma* theory instilled guilt into the mind of the *Sudras* that their present miserable status is in fact the result of their own deeds albeit done in their previous lives, and imposed fear in them that more such births would result if they disobeyed the *Varna* Laws. Endogamous marriages (marriages within each caste) were ordered to preserve the purity of the higher race. Finally, cruel deterrent punishments such as pouring hot lead into the ear, or making the defaulter tread the streets with sharp bramble branches hanging down his neck, ensured the flourishing of the *Varna* system. Thus the caste system, kept alive by the *Rig Veda*, the *Gita*, the *Manusastra*, the theory of *Karma*, endogamous marriages and severe punishments, has succeeded in the breeding of 3000 sub-castes in the 3000 years since the original four.

*Svadharm*a punishment was even worse for those brave Indians who challenged the *Varna* system; these were forced out of Hindu society as 'casteless' *Panchamas* (the fifth group), and were treated as 'slaves,' to do only menial jobs such as scavenging, without showing the least disgust and without expecting any reward except the joy of doing their own duty. They were dehumanized, made poor, called impure, untouchable and ignorant—without rights to live in the village, use the well, the street, the temple or school. They fell from caste for desiring to do the duties of others.²³⁶

²³⁵ Zaehner: *The Bhagavad Gita*, 175, *Gita* 3. 35. In ethical matters Krishna is not an innovator; in each incarnation He merely re-establishes the old *dharma* when it is in decline.

Chit Bhavananda, *Bhagavat-Gita*, 248: changing one's duty mid-stream is perilous because fear of duty will cause many more deaths and births.

²³⁶ Falling from the caste for 'doing another's duty' is explicit in almost identical verses in *Manu* (6. 66; 10. 97), and the *Bhagavad-Gita* (3. 35). This duty, devoid of any good qualities is inherently inadequate, involving an impure occupation, or duty not done well. India has the scavenger caste even now.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (2. 31-37), Krishna tells Arjuna why he should do his *kshatriya*-caste-duty and fight the war: he will gain honor and paradise for doing his prescribed duty or reap dishonor and hell for not doing it.²³⁷

Even when Plato speaks about the three classes or types of men, of gold, silver and clay, fit to be kings, philosophers and workers, respectively, his system does not bequeath their duties to their progeny: profession comes according to merit, not birth. People are not mass-produced into four classes by their three *gunas*. Instead, they involuntarily transmit their genes differently to their children, who could take up different professions at their will, preference, training and capability, with freedom. But, in India, the lower castes still remain low while social change towards an egalitarian society is restricted by one caste and its powerful schools.

Caste system in the *Gita* provokes some vital questions concerning caste *per se* and the role that the *Gita* plays in maintaining such an ethically abhorrent system. When a new book was brought to the sages of ancient India, they asked the author certain legitimate questions such as, 'Says who?' 'What is the purport?' 'To whose advantage?' 'Who is the intended audience?' We too should ask the author of the *Gita* such questions.

Our first question is 'Says who?' or 'Who is the author?' The author of the *Bhagavad-Gita*'s religious discourse is anonymous as a direct or indirect word of God. What is *Gita*'s purport? Is its priority God, *bhakti* or caste? Who is its beneficiary? Who

²³⁷ The *Mahabharata* epic story tells how Arjuna had to go to hell for not willingly and spontaneously obeying the caste-law. However, since Arjuna had surrendered his will to Krishna to fight as a Kshatriya, he would be born just one more time - as a male in a good Brahmin family so that he may qualify to read the scriptures - and attain *moksha*. Only a Brahmin man, not even a *Brahmin* woman, can attain *moksha* for he alone can learn *Sanskrit* and have the knowledge of God. But the *Brahmin* woman has to be a perfect wife in order to be born a *Brahmin* man in her next birth to attain *moksha*. So strict and stringent are the *dharma* of caste and gender. Fear of births intimidated the lower caste men and all women to consent to do their respective obligatory duty. *Manu*, the author of the Laws was the forefather of the *Brahmins*.

is its first audience and who the secondary? What is the reason for perpetuating the evil caste system and subordinating a whole nation under the high caste oligarchs? Kosambi's rational and well-documented answers are as follows.²³⁸

Kosambi asserts that it is clear that the Song of the Divine is sung in *Sanskrit* by the *Brahmins* for the upper classes, as they alone could read and write *Sanskrit*, and only though them the *Gita* is intended for the lower castes and for all women, who are the necessary target audience: this group of people will get the message about caste and gender duties through the *puranas* and stories, which were written intentionally in their own vernacular.

Kosambi points out that practically anything can be read into the *Gita* by a determined person, without denying the validity of the class system. Many have utilized the *Gita* as the one scriptural source which could be used with dexterity to reconcile the irreconcilable in many different ways, without violence to accepted *Brahmin* methodology, but draw interpretation and justification for social actions in some way disagreeable to a branch of the ruling class upon whose mercy the *Brahmins* depended at the moment. The system achieved this unique position by a remarkable interpolation of the *Manu*-injunctions into the *Gita* and the *Rig Veda*; the *Gita* was systematically utilized by the upper caste in such a way that caste and gender laws are in vogue even today in the whole of India in different garbs and styles.²³⁹ Gail Omvedt too confirms that the final triumph of Brahmanism in the last half of the first millennium BCE resulted in a

²³⁸ D. D. Kosambi, *Historical Development of the Bhagavad-Gita in Studies in the History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, 246. The four-caste division has been created by Me." And "For those who take refuge in Me, be they even of the sinful breeds such as women, *vaisyas* and *sudras*..." are the oft quoted words of Krishna (4.13; 9.32).

²³⁹ Kosambi, *Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavad-Gita*, The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol.4, No. 2(Aug, 1961) p.p. 202-203.
See the plagiaristic verses in the Table above.

fiercely hierarchical caste society that fixed the masses into unprecedented forms of exploitation.²⁴⁰

5. 2). I would believe that if the caste laws in the *Gita* are interpolations, they are contrary to the very spirit of the *Gita*. If the *Gita* did not support the caste system, but insisted instead on its primary truth, viz., the love of God (*bhakti*), then this truth, *bhakti*, would abolish caste, and correct the wrongs perpetuated by caste on the entire Indian society. On the positive aspect, if God's love within the human heart (*bhakti*) could be applied equally on all irrespective of color or gender, caste would become a gruesome mythology or a folk-lore of the past. We would look forward to that.

If the interpolations regarding the caste system are removed, the *Gita* would continue as a social gospel. The Indian term, *Dalit*, (crushed) is the modern word for the lowest castes of the caste system, which has imbalanced the whole society by putting one community above all the individuals in the community. This paper anticipates an egalitarian society in India, in which, the term, *Dalit*, would be deleted as redundant.

S. S. More sees such an egalitarian society as a definite possibility because the social theory of the *Gita* can be applied against the caste system. He utilizes the allegory of the upside-down 'cosmic eternal fig tree' (15.1)²⁴¹ to explain the gradation in

²⁴⁰ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), 280.

²⁴¹ S. S. More, *The Gita's Theory of Human Action*, (Delhi: Satguru Publications, 1990), 166. The three principles, 'existence,' 'continuation,' and 'self-satisfaction' are grounded in man's relation with others. The tree is the society, the branches are the community, and downward roots are individuals connected with *samsara*.

The '*Asvattha*' fig tree mentioned here is '*Ficus bengalensis*,' is a tree that grows sideways into a spreading tree, which puts out strong roots from its long branches into the ground in search of water and nourishment, and supports the tree like pillars. '*Ficus religiosa*' is the Peepal tree under which the Buddha found enlightenment. The 'cosmic fig tree' occurs first in the *Rig Veda* 1.24.7, next in the *Katha Up.* 6.1 and the *Svetasvatara* 3.7; and also in the *Mahabharata* 14.47 and *Samyutta-nikaya* 1v.160. The *Gita* borrows the

Krishna's Theory of social good and individual good, in which the community is more important than the individual and the society more than the community. The wheel of *dharma* turns for two reasons: the existence and continuation of the society which are for the good of the individual man himself (3.14-16) in relation to the society. Successful existence needs its solidarity, and continuation of the society needs change; change includes adaptation according to changing environment to achieve integrity, order, peace and discipline. As undue solidarity is detrimental to changing-dynamism of the society, solidarity and change should be in balance for the good of man. Man (Arjuna), as a being in the society, is expected to undertake action (war) on account of his relation with other individuals and community. According to Krishna, the mistake of Arjuna is that he cares more for himself and his *Kshatriya* community, which is itself on the verge of annihilation due to its undue solidarity at this time, instead of the whole society. Although it is difficult for Arjuna to accept, Krishna has no difficulty in justifying destruction of the community for the sake of the society which is larger.²⁴²

The simile of the cosmic, eternal, (*asvattha*) fig tree goes as follows. It is an upside-down tree, whose downward roots from the branches have to be cut with the sword of *buddhi*, in order to have the whole tree (society) saved from absorbing the poisonous waters of *samsara* below, in order that the tree will live eternally from its upward roots, which connect it with rain from the blue sky and deathless waters (*amrta*) from *Brahman* (or God).

However, More maintains that this argument must not be mistaken as justifying annihilation of any community as such, but it does justify doing away with any social

simile from the *Katha* and uses it more in line with Buddhism than the *Upanishad* (Zachner, Bhagavad-Gita, n. 361).

²⁴² Mahabharata, *Santriparvan*, 32.8.

system such as that of the four-caste. Although caste might have come into vogue for division of labor at a certain primitive stage, it is now threatening the cohesive existence and successful continuation of the Indian society. More insists that just as the needs of the individual have to change with changing circumstances of life, the society also should introduce changes to particular social systems, structures, institutions and modes of action in order to make its existence and continuation possible, meaningful, and justified if time and context demand: *varna dharma* should be abolished for the good of the society, and this is Krishna's purpose in this *avatara*.

The following four key verses, (4.7; 4.8; 12.15; 18.66) would support our argument that Krishna's theory of social justice is against *Manu's* law of color (*manava-dharma*) because it is lawlessness (anarchy) to the community (4.7); evil (cruel) to the individuals (4.8); therefore, God will set up the law of righteousness (justice for the whole society) (12.15). Cruel shrinking away from individuals could refer to untouchability practiced by the hypocritical high caste (12.15); All the laws that have to be given up would include man-made Law of *Manu* (*manava-dharma*) (18.66); if you would cut off man-made evil sastras, God will be your refuge against all evils (18.66).

Whenever righteousness withers away and lawlessness arises,
then I generate myself [on earth]. (4.7)

For, the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil doers, for the
setting up of the law of righteousness I come into being age after age. (4.8)

The man I love 'from whom people do not shrink,' and 'who does not shrink'
from them, who is free from exaltation, fear impatience and excitement (12. 15)

Give up all things of law, turn to Me, your only refuge, [for]
I will deliver you from all evils; have no care (18. 66).

I tend to agree, with More, that as *varna-dharma* (caste system) is not a *dharma* (justice) anymore, but rather an *adharma*, the *Gita* uses the principle of *avatara*, that "whenever justice deteriorates and injustice rises (*"yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati"*), Krishna generates himself on earth. We can presume that 4.7-8 would mean that in the present *avatar*, Krishna would destroy *varna-dharma*, and replace it with a new democratic egalitarian *dharma*, (*bhakti*) to prevent a revolutionary reaction of the crushed. Similarly, 12.15 would mean that Krishna opposes the false, dogmatic, static and absurd notion of the *dharma* of untouchability that is used to save the purity of the elite.

Further, in 18.66, Krishna, finally gives permission to Arjuna to give up all laws because the emancipated man transcends all laws [even *Manu's* laws] to achieve his goal of deliverance (God), by depending on God's grace alone. In other words, if you want to save the fig tree (*samsara*, the whole process of the larger society), it is wise to cut off all its downward roots (man-made laws that transpire births), and preserve the upward roots connected to immortal God (of eternal laws for eternal salvation without births).

In support of his theory, More says, similar to the *Gita*, the *Mahabharata* too gives the gradation of actions in terms of preference, as follows: One should abandon the individual for the sake of caste-group, abandon caste-group for the sake of village, and village for the sake of society, and society for one's own self.²⁴³ The good of larger sections would culminate in the good of the smaller ones in the long run.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Mahabharata, *sabhaparvan*, 55.10. Society is interpreted as the largest social unit.

²⁴⁴ More, *The Gita Theory of Human Action*, 171-74

If India wants to nourish and save the 250 million or more low caste people and the *Dalit* people (the crushed) in the interest of the whole society (the upside-down Eternal *Asvattha*-Fig-tree 15.1-4), it needs to cut off the roots of the tree (caste laws) that preserve a single minority upper caste community. This is urgent because the creation of a casteless and classless society, the cherished ideal of the Indian constitution, sixty three years old, still remains infantile. Measures taken by the Government to benefit the *Dalits* have been insufficient; protests by reformers such as Dr.Ambedkhar, *Mahatma* Phule and Ramaswami Periyar could not eradicate caste; even the Communist Party regimes did nothing much to remove caste. *Dalits* are losing their patience after twenty five centuries of humiliation and dehumanization; an urgent dynamic social change is needed.²⁴⁵

. If India does not want another *kuru-kshetra* war but a *dharmakshetra* of justice, (*Gita* 1.1), it has to accomplish yet another bloodless revolution as it did in the past century to save India from the British *Raj*. It is true, complete annihilation of caste could be achieved by passing a bill of freedom, by the combined effort of the whole nation, similar to the demolition of slavery, the *apartheid* and the Berlin wall. However, it is also true, that caste distinctions will not disappear by a bill on paper or by superficial changes made in the superstructure of caste-culture, but only by letting the *Dalits* reveal their full-likeness of the humanity of God and their full image of the glory of God, for the *Dalits* were also created from the heart, mind, mouth, hands and breath of God, certainly not from the foot of God as *Manu*, the *Rig Veda* and the *Gita* tell us.

If the *Gita* has to be the Gospel of Love and Grace, its teachings on *bhakti* must be fully used, and its teachings on the interpolated verses of Manu about caste must be

²⁴⁵ Katti Padma Rao, Annihilation of Caste- as a Principle in *Caste and Alternative Culture*, 39-58 You cannot build a nation or a morality on the foundation of caste.

totally disused. If the wrongs perpetuated by caste must be remedied, the immeasurable love of God in the hearts of people must be fuelled by *bhakti* that the neighbor would be loved as oneself, irrespective of race, color or gender.

5 CONCLUSION OF THE THESIS

1. THE *GITA* LAUNCHES THEISM AND *BHAKTI*,
2. THE *GITA* BANISHES CASTE

5.1 THE *GITA* VICTORIOUSLY INAUGURATES THEISM AND *BHAKTI*

The *Gita* has a synchronized-twin goal: the superiority of theism over Brahmanism and the superiority of *bhakti* over *jnana* and *karma*. Accordingly, the *Gita* lifts high the personal God Krishna as the only, supreme, transcendent, true divinity, whose love is accessible (*sulabbha* 8.14) to people of all classes and genders, by *bhakti*, which is the easy, direct, and sure way to the personal God for salvation. *Bhakti marga* was the exact need of the time to bring concord between the two discordant margas, *jnana* and *karma*.

The *Gita* has certainly accomplished its twin goal successfully, placing Krishna as the *Brahman* of the *Vedas*, *Atman* of the *Upanishads*, *Purusha* of the *Sankhyas*, *Brahma-Bhuta* (the liberated man) of the Buddhists, and *Nirvana* too; now *Brahman* is God's womb for His (God's) seed. The *carama-sloka* (the last sayings of the *Gita*) sings with triumphant joy that its mission is accomplished; it sings the ecstatic, open love song of Krishna to all His *bhaktas* (18. 64-66); and gives out the last solemn teaching (*mantra*) of the *guru* to His graduating pupil in the Upanishadic style. Unlike the *Vedic* scriptures that were locked up from the common people, the song of love is wide open to all.

The *Gita* does not teach a universalism, i.e., salvation by whatever divinity or whatever way (4. 11), as Radhakrishnan interprets;²⁴⁶ the *Gita* does not harmonize Advaitic *Brahman* and the personal God, but makes its objective noticeably clear that it is

²⁴⁶ Minor, *The Gita's Way*, p. 348: Radhakrishnan interprets *Gita* 4. 11 to mean universalism or "catholicity," with which, even Sankara's interpretation of this verse disagrees: Krishna rewards people differently on the basis of their approach to Him...people may receive on the basis of their approach, but not all will be granted the goal of the *Gita*, *moksha*. This is not Radhakrishnan's exposition of many paths to the goal. On the other hand, it is Krishna's 'Me-Alone' way.

monotheistic: Worship Me alone, 'none other' (*ananya* 12.6).²⁴⁷ Its one emphatic message is that Krishna, the personal God, is the 'Absolute highest;' He is the Unmanifest (masculine) beyond the (neutral) Unmanifest *Brahman* (*avyakto-avyaktat-sanatanah* 8.20); the more exalted Imperishable *Purushottama* than the Imperishable *Brahman* (15.18), primeval (*anadhi*), without end (*ananta*) and will never perish (*avinasi*) when all else will perish. Krishna, the personal God, claims to be wisdom's highest goal, the One all-highest-way (as I really Am 18.55) replacing the basic Upanishadic *Brahman* thesis that Brahman is the one thing that is first, last and the only reality (*satyasya-satya*).²⁴⁸

T

he question is, if people knew that Krishna is the highest God (9. 23-24, 11.52) and controller of the three basic elements of *prakriti's* Nature (7. 4-5), why would they worship other, lesser gods? The *Gita* (Krishna) reasons out the advantage of monotheism succinctly: all creatures follow their own Nature (3.33); when wisdom is swept away by many desires, their inherent Nature initiates their faith in other gods (7.20); but even that instinctive faith comes from Me (7.21); worship of other gods bestows only finite rewards...;but whoso loves-and-worships Me will come to Me and have lasting union with Me (7.23). Krishna claims to be that One God who alone is worthy of worship of all.

²⁴⁷ Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 327. Zaehner explains: Despite Krishna's positive encouragement of the faith of people who worship other Gods (7.21, 9.23) because in doing so they are really worshipping Him, it becomes increasingly clear in the latter half of the *Gita* that worship, meditation and love should be directed to Him alone: 8.14; 8.22; 9.13; 9.22; 9.30; 11.54; 12.6; 13.10-11. Unswerving loyalty-and-love for Me with spiritual exercise on no other bent, this is "knowledge" (*adhyatma-jnanam*: notes 13.10, 11, p.337.

²⁴⁸ Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 380: the "Brahman thesis." The basic '*Brahman* thesis' comprises all the-pairs-of opposites (*dvandva*) that proceed from it, whether physically, in the course of life's evolution, or conceptually, as logical distinctions occurring to the intellect coincident with thought. Perceived pairs-of-opposites reflect the nature not of things but of the perceiving mind.

Thus the *Gita* is very clear about Krishna's superiority over other gods, and His insistence that if they are wise and want lasting liberation, they would worship Him alone. 'All roads do not lead to Rome,' and all paths are not equally successful. Unswerving loyalty and love for Me with spiritual exercise bent on no other, this is knowledge of the self (*adhyatma-jnanam* 13. 10-11); the deepest inherent wisdom.

Robert Minor maintains, contrary to most interpreters, and I tend to agree with his interpretation, that the *Gita* gives little hope for those who refuse to worship Krishna. Although one has the choice to take any road and end up in any destination (7. 20-23), and although all the three ways, *Jnana*, *karma* and *bhakti* are acceptable, according to Krishna, *bhakti* is the best choice for *mukti* ²⁴⁹ The new player, *bhakti*, does not banish the two old players, *jnana* and *karma*, but plays with them as the better player, thus supplying all that is needed for the complete man's intellect, action and feeling – to know God, love God and serve God.

In sum, *bhakti yoga* is the *Gita*'s preferred way to salvation, as it is easy, direct and sure. *Jnana yoga* is open only to a few elite who have access to the Scriptures; *karma yoga*, although open to all, is very difficult, especially, when *karma-yogis* are forced to do the obligatory caste duty. People have their freedom to choose the pathway they might practice; in the *Gita* freedom works within the context of devotion, knowledge and non-attached action (12.6-12).^{250, 251}

²⁴⁹ Minor, *The Gita's Way as the Only Way*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jul., 1980), pp. 339-354.

²⁵⁰ Minor, *The Gita's Way as the Only Way*, 351. Some *Gita* scholars emphasize *jnana* into their schemes, some exegete that the path of *Karma* is the unambiguous practical universalistic Hindu message of activism, where action should not be done as a means to an end (fruit) but as the end in itself (2.47); one may be liberated by *karma*, *jnana* or *bhakti*; everyone should work, and non-attached work leads towards *mukti*.

CONCLUSION: 5. 2: THE GITA IS AGAINST CASTE**KRISHNA CASTS OUT ADHARMA:****SO, CAST OUT CASTE, THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM, AND DELETE THE WORD DALIT**

It is time to end all the three thousand castes of India and all the discrimination and inequality in the Indian society due to them in all these three thousand years, for they are unjust (*adharma*). In the context of India's economic and scientific progress, caste hierarchy is an anachronism. Even if division of labor of a primitive kind could be justified when the caste system was first introduced, it should have no place in modern India. The moral law, it was based on, should have been re-expounded, from time to time, by the society, as the world around it was twirling, - as it was done by the incarnate God (*avatara purusha*) at every age (*yuge- yuge*), so that the old unjust systems would be replaced by the society, each time, with practicable, just, new moral laws. (4.8).

When man lived close to the forest, he had the law of the jungle, where might is right; or the law of the fish, *macha nyaya*, where the big fish swallows the small with impunity. But as humanity attains maturity, its law should also be more mature. But the common problem that confronts traditional societies round the world is that scientific progress takes place side by side with practices of human inequality. It seems that the *Gita* is challenging such a situation in its own time, with its renowned doctrine of *Avatara* found in its well-known verse (4.8) issuing a declaration to destroy injustice (*adharma*) and set up the law of righteousness (*dharma*). The law of the jungle that exploits the weak definitely violates the *Gita's* ideals of love and grace. Many live in the midst of castes but do not see the evil generated by castes. An elephant in our living room

²⁵¹ Ranchan, *Revisioning Gita*, 102. *Bhakti* to the personal God is the preferred way of the *Gita*. However, the Visishtadvaitin devotees combine the Unmanifest Brahman of Vedanta and Personal God of the *bhakti* religion; others devotees add a multitude of gods, sects and schools.

should be recognized as anarchy and it should be driven away into the jungle, where it belongs. Caste in the human family is also lawlessness, it should be cast out.

In view of the fact that such a symbiotic existence of caste-and-*bhakti* is clearly seen in the sacred text of the *Gita*, scholars and religious persons explain away the teachings of the *Gita* according to their own inhumane social and religious convictions, with apathy, as allegory, typology, metaphor, structuralism, layering of society - unrelated to the nature of suffering— physical, emotional, spiritual, social, economic - in the society caused by fellow human beings ²⁵². It is this heartless indifference to unjust practices that has perpetuated the evils of caste for over 3000 years – making it all the more difficult to eradicate as time went on.

The special way in which the fifty *bhakti* verses are schematically arranged in the middle six chapters points to the intentionality of the author, while the placement of a smaller number on *varna* verses in the early or last chapters causes suspicion of a later author. Krishna's commending *bhakti* at one time and caste duties another time confuses the readers as to which of them is the purport of the text. As caste is tied to rebirths, those who fear rebirths choose to practice caste faithfully than to risk the cycles of *samsara*. Due to lack of understanding or fear, they do not choose either *bhakti* or caste, but both *bhakti* and caste so as to have the best of both worlds: Thus both high and low castes end up having both *bhakti* and caste. Whoever interpolated verses from the Manu sastra into the *Gita* was ingenious in choosing the *Gita* as the best vehicle for the task, for it certainly had authenticity, acceptability and a wide, elite and popular readership that

²⁵² Purushothama Billimoria and J. V. D'Cruze, *BhagavadGita: a perspective of Text in New Essays in the BhagavadGita* Compiled by Arvind Sharma, p. 57, footnotes 14 which refers to M. M. Kothari saying that the allegorical interpretations of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan commend what the *Gita* condemns [caste], and condemn what it commends [war].

would spread the news. However, the *Gita* is a bad choice for this purpose of interpolation because any intelligent reader can detect caste visibly unlike the universal love of God.

This paper justifies its theory that caste is extraneous to the *Gita*.

The legendary divine swan of India could drink the milk alone out of a cup of milk mixed with water; but as there are no such swans to detect interpolations, we have to churn the *Gita* to separate its cream from water. Before we start churning, we emphasize the futility of trying to establish the authenticity of any interpolation unequivocally as no interpolator leaves his finger-prints, name and intention. Therefore, this paper bases its claim that caste is extraneous to the *Gita*, firstly on textual criticism of the *Gita* itself, and secondly on wider researches of other literary evidences for interpolations. It attempts to do this in the spirit of the seeker after truth which is humility without any baseness, an infinite hope and high fearlessness.²⁵³

a) Textual Criticism:

Just as a professor deduces plagiarism in a student's essay, an intelligent reader can also suspect interpolation, for caste is a starkly inconsistent element in the consistent doctrine of universal love of God. So the scholar asks if the *Gita* was written by a single author or two - is the *Gita* an Aria or a Duet?²⁵⁴ Which is the intruder, *bhakti* or caste or their counterparts, theism or *Advaitism*?

²⁵³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, (Oxford 1939: Oxford University Press, 1996), 358: *brahmana lakshana* prescribed by Sage Vasishtha for the disinterested seekers of truth. I am surprised and pained that Rk says, "If the *Brahmin* class was found necessary even in those less organized and complicated times, it is much more necessary today."

²⁵⁴ Professor R. Brown, *Song of the Lord: Aria or Duet?* In *Bhakti, Karuna Agap*, Ed. Gaicocaea (New York: Birmingham University, 2002).

One dominant argument is that the author of the *Gita* is a theist; the *Gita* as it came from his pen is completely theistic; but a later editor has interpolated passages which are monistic in their trend. However, it is impossible to prove it conclusively. If we were to throw out the passages written by a different hand, which ones would we throw out?²⁵⁵

If *bhakti* and caste were from the same author and at the same time, the clue would be a pattern in the arrangement of the two elements in the text in relation to each other, which is missing.. There are fifty *bhakti* verses making a meticulous blue-print for a magnificent building in the mid-six chapters²⁵⁶ and in contrast, only a dotting of the idea of caste (in 2.33; 3.35, 4.13; 18.41-45) is seen, which makes one search for an explanation for the difference.

Krishna's unequivocal command to do one's caste duty (3.35) and His compassionate, ethical and philosophical concept of grace (12.13-20) are incompatible and contradictory; both cannot be from one pen. It is brilliant plagiarism to introduce Manu's utilitarian decree as God's command without any explanation.²⁵⁷

The existence of numerous contradicting interpretations of the *Gita* text raises doubts about a single writer. Two ideas of God and *Brahman* closely follow each other alternately. In an account of *kshetrajna* and *kshetra* in which Krishna claims Himself to be the knower of the field (13.1-3), God's knowledge suddenly becomes a list of virtues, such as asceticism, *ahimsa*, self-knowledge, philosophical knowledge (13.7-9; 11) which, surprisingly, includes *bhakti* also among them (13.10). In the same chapter, in verses 11-

²⁵⁵ A. J. Appasamy, *Bhagavad Gita*, p. 127: he refers to this argument comes from Garbe, which comes from the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.

²⁵⁶ Table 2 on page 23 of this thesis.

²⁵⁷ Kosambi, *Bhagavad Gita*, in J. of Economic, 203: the contradiction goes unexamined because the victims had no access to the scriptures

17 *Brahman* is clearly the Real object of knowledge, while 13.18 comes round to the kshatrajna of 13.3, who is God, and about offering loving worship to Him.. Could all these be from one pen? Did the single author simply bring together opposite points of view realizing their important values but without resolving them into a complete argument?²⁵⁸ This illustrates an extraneous idea intertwining the coherent thought of a single author.²⁵⁹ Intrusions are done to confuse the basic motive and validity of the text. With hind vision, that is what intrusions have done to the monotheistic assertion of the *Gita*.

b) References to modern *Gita* commentators:

In the introduction to his famous commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Radhakrishnan notes that there are many alterations to the *Gita* in subsequent times, discusses Rudolph Otto and Jacobi's references to interpolations, but sees them as the author's brilliant synthesis of incongruous elements.²⁶⁰ M. Hiriyanna, in his *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, speaks of additions and changes by later redactors.²⁶¹

Kosambi's states that the initial benedictory stanza, *Narayaniya namaskrtya* (verse 0 that precedes verse1), was introduced to make the whole of the *Mahabharata* into a Vaishnava document, which, in 1933, V.S.Sukthankar's text-criticism stripped as a late

²⁵⁸ Appasamy, *Bhagavad Gita*, 128.

²⁵⁹ Zaehner, *Bhagavad Gita*, 336: It is quite possible that verses 7-25 are interpolation introduced perhaps at the time when verse 0 which is missing in several manuscripts first became current. This seems all the more probable in that the definition of knowledge or wisdom in 7-11 is totally different from that in verses 2 and 34. The wisdom of virtues in 7-11 is not the same as wisdom in the rest of the *Gita*, which is direct intuition of the eternal Being.

²⁶⁰ Radhakrishnan, *BhagavadGita*, 14-15.

²⁶¹ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines*, 15: He uses various terms for interpolations: amended, received additions to it, additions are still being made but original titles are retained, not fully authentic etc

forgery. Kosambi confirms Zaehner that interpolations such as verse 0 in chapter 13 came into the *Gita* at the time when 0 verses were first devised.²⁶²

Kosambi conjectures that 4.13; 5.18; 9.33 and 13.7-25 could be interpolations. In 4.13 Krishna is the generator of the four castes; in 5.18 these wise ones see the *Brahman*, cow, elephant and dog or outcaste as the same; in 9.33 the base-born, women artisans and serfs born of sinful wombs could have *moksha*; in 13.7-25 theism - Advaitism are intertwined

As we have seen earlier in chapter 4 of this paper, A. J. Appasamy and Stephen Neill also speak of redactions in the *Gita*, and contradictions due to them.

K. Kunjunni Raja's paper that he read at the *Gita* Samiksha conference explains that the extant texts of the *Mahabharata* and the *Gita* have been critically examined, translated and studied by experts, ancient and modern, at various stages in the history of the text. Belvalker played a big role in attempting to 'unriddle the riddle' caused by the discrepancies of the texts, a few of which are briefly mentioned below.

Kunjunni says that two texts were available, the Kashmir recension and the Indian vulgate version. The difference between a recension and a version is one of degree: a recension denotes far-reaching alterations in the text beyond the limits of the text and province, and vulgate is the version in common use. The vulgate text used by both Sankara and Ramanuja contains 700 verses, while the Kashmiri version has 745 verses, and the Old Javanese version 56 more verses. To the Western Indologists, Holtzman, Hopkins, Garbe, and Rudolph Otto, the text of the *Gita* was a problematic; their careful study to discover the *Ur-Gita* (original *Gita*) led them to finding many strands of

²⁶² Kosambi, *Social and Economic Aspects*, 200 speaks about the *Mahabharata* inflations by the *Bhrgu Brahmin* families and the opposite *Narayaniya* inflations by the Vaishnava theists. The *Bhrgus* excluded the famous benedictory stanza (*narayaniya namaskrtya*) from the critical text while they inflated the needless emphasis upon Parasurama.

philosophical doctrines, some of them mutually contradictory, and believing that the text must have evolved through accretions as a result of interpolations at the hands of various redactors. Garbe's claim to 170 interpolated verses and stratifications have been refuted by Belvalkar. Prof. F. Otto Schrader's research (Adayar 1930) drew attention, for the first time, to the problem of the Kashmiri recension used by the classical commentators²⁶³ that it was older than the vulgate; but Belvalkar's examinations disputed this proposition, reversed it and placed the Kashmir recension later and secondary; Prof. T. R. Chintamani's new research (Madras University 1941), however, showed it was a distinct recension with alterations. Jayatirta says that the structural changes to *Gita* 6.7 of the traditional text were made by a later commentator, Bhatta Bhaskara of Kashmir to remedy the grammatical defects as the meaning was not clear to him. Prof Gonda's detailed study of the Kashmir readings of the *BhagavadGita* found that the errors were due to a lack of scholarship on the part of the translator. This 'error,' however, led commentators from Sankara and the Indologists to Radhakrishnan, to debate if the 'self' in this verse (6.7) is the Advaitin Self, the individual self or the theistic God. Belvalkar also examined a third recension of the *Gita* and showed that it did not serve as an important finger-printer on the trail of the *Ur-text* of the *Bhagavad Gita* in spite of its fairly old date. The third recension text adds a new stanza, 11.59.²⁶⁴ With all these researches the *Ur Gita* has not been unearthed. Kosambi's thesis is that the *Gita* was a new composition, not an expansion of a shorter religious instruction, that a definite expansion has happened centuries later, and that the *AnuGita* in the *Mahabharata* 14th Canto (*Asvamedha -parva*) itself is an inflation.

²⁶³ Franklin Edgerton also refers to this Kashmiri recension in his *Gita* Volume 1. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952) xiii.

²⁶⁴ K. Kunjunni Raja, *The BhagavadGita: the Problems of the Text in Gita Samiksha*, 161-8

Summing up, interpolations to the *Mahabharata*, which embodies the *Gita*, have been established by honest researches. Interpolation of caste into the text of the *Gita* is difficult to prove except by the contradictions it causes within the text. Any interpolation is done for a particular reason. In the *Gita*, it seems to have been done by a later redactor for the benefit of the highest caste as we notice that the use of caste is vital to its continued existence on top of the entire society, at the expense of the rest. Interpolation of caste into a most trust-worthy religious literature has been detrimental to the cohesiveness, not only of the *Gita* text, but of the whole of the Indian society. Caste in the *Gita* is criminal abuse of the intents of the *Gita*, equal to the unacceptable presence of an elephant in the living room; therefore caste must be banished from India forever.

If these caste laws in the *Gita* are not interpolations, but rather integral to the *Gita*, the victims of the segregation would doubt the *Gita*'s credibility as the gospel of love and grace. Whether caste entered the *Gita* when it was first written or later, the victims blame the *Gita* for their sufferings, and demand democratic justice. Victims cry, but the world does not hear or see. In the interest of the health of the whole society and the wellness of the weaker communities, caste should be eliminated. People say that the situation is not as bad as it used to be but is that good enough? Who will solve the problem – the perpetrator, the law, or the victim; and how? Will this happen within our life-time or would we have to wait another epoch of slow evolution of justice?

Mahatma Gandhi asks how this blot on Hinduism may be removed.

It is necessary for the Hindus to repent of the wrong we have done, to alter our behaviour towards those whom we have suppressed" by a system as devilish as believe the English system of the Government of India. We must treat them as our blood brothers. We must return to them the inheritance we have robbed them....We may not wait till eternity for this much belated

reformation. We must aim to bringing it about within this year. It is a reform not to slow *swaraj* but to precede it. M. K. Gandhi ²⁶⁵

The above exhortation applies equally to all Indians including Christians, who are bound by caste. We have the answer in the *Gita* (15.3) and the *AnuGita* (MBh. 14.47. 12-14) that proclaim God's permission to take the stout axe of wisdom and cut off the fat roots of man-made *adharma* laws of the eternal fig tree, the society, which means it is a virtual war. The tree will not die by such cutting, for it has roots growing upwards reaching God's universal *dharma* through human devotional love (*bhakti*), which is godly wisdom. Love is not a naïve Pollyanna but a mother who will do anything to save her child from danger or insult. If ordinary humanity or laws of the country will not free the *Dalits*, it is the duty of all *bhaktas* to use wisdom's axe of collective, strong, just, democratic methods to wage a revolution until caste is demolished completely and finally – perhaps like the Berlin Wall, in a single day.

We have to re-call and re-discover the insights of the *Gita*; which has a message for our context today as it did when it was first written. It has transcendental truths glimpsed in *sruti*, and broader truths as a *smṛti* applicable to practical, down-to-earth human existential problems in a declining culture. History stands witness to the damaging changes that have occurred to the use of caste laws over time. Arjuna represents the whole society of India; Arjuna should not hide behind allegorical interpretations of what the *Gita* commends and what it condemns as some revered national leaders have done, ²⁶⁶ but fight an uncompromising war on the battlefields of *svadharma* and *dharma* (*dharmakshetra*) and re-establish a just society.

²⁶⁵ Louis Fischer, (Ed) *The Essential Gandhi*, p. 136.

²⁶⁶ Purushottama Billimoria & J. V. D'Cruze, *BhagavadGita: a perspective, Gita New Essays in the BhagavadGita*, ED. Anand Sharma, 51-77; and n. 14 o p. 57: These refer to Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.

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**Thilagavathi (TILLY) Chandulal's Presentation at the Defence of Her Thesis:
The Historical Game-Changes in the
Philosophy of Devotion and Caste
As Used and Misused
by the
Bhagavad Gita
22. 6. 2011**

Thank you, Dean, examiners and teachers, for the Colloquium today, and for the privilege to be a student at Brock, where both Eastern and Western philosophies are taught under one roof. In ancient India, philosophers held colloquia-for-their-own-students, or authors of new-books-or-theories. I'm reminded of one particular colloquium held by the greatest Upanishadic philosopher, Yajnavalkya, about two thousand and five hundred ago, in which Gargi, a woman philosopher, discussed with him the origins-of-'the-warps-and-the-woofs'-of-the-external-world. Today, I feel, I'm discussing the 'warps-and-woofs' of-*bhakti* in the awesome presence of eminent Tamil sages Kapilar, Valluvar, Kambar, Ilango and Andal. Thank you for the privilege! I'm awed and humbled.

This thesis is a philosophical overview of the long history of "*bhakti-and-caste*" as found in the Bhagavad-*Gita*, and how these two have affected the Indian-society for three thousand years. The thesis construes that the author of the *Gita* used his work to propagate *bhakti*; but over time, others have misused it to perpetuate the hierarchical caste system; the *bhakti* religion integrated people under one God, whereas caste split the society into rigid divisions in the name of God. This essay identifies the 'classical game changes,' which is my turn of phrase, in the history of the *bhakti* religion: the changes resemble the Copernican-reversal-of doctrine and the re-reversals due to contentions between philosophical ideals and realities. *Bhakti* is a twin-mystery, a two-way-track of

love and grace: devotional love of the human beings to God, and the gracious love of God to human beings. Based on the *Gita's* textual information, my paper back-wheels into the distant past before coming to the present times visioning its hopes for the future.

My thesis is that the purport of the *Gita* is *bhakti*. The *Gita's* anonymous author, whose pseudonym is Vyasa, which means "Composer," most efficiently reveals his theme, *bhakti*, by his classical methodology, elegant composition and creative ability, which have made his *opus magnum*, a work-of-art and a most-readable book. *The Gita* has become the best-loved Hindu classic for at least six good reasons:

- 1). The *Gita* was the first philosophical religious text on *bhakti* in the history of *Sanskrit* literature.
- 2). The *Gita's bhakti* religion was the first religion to open its gates of love freely to all people of all classes, all castes and both genders of India: societal active involvement, *pra-vrtti*.
- 3). *Bhakti* is a unique personal path to a personal-God with direct access without any intermediary-human-priestly agents.
- 4) *Bhakti* is the easiest path (*sulabbha*) to attain liberation from the 'cycles of birth' because, unlike the Paths of Knowledge and Work (*jnana* and *karma*), *bhakti* does not require a) the Knowledge of the Scriptures, which were denied to all but the upper classes; or b) the hard disciplines of *yoga* exercises, meditation, asceticism, or caste-duties set by Manu's 'man-made social-laws,' the '*smrtis*.'
- 5). Besides, the Personal God says, His "Name" is *Sulabbha*, he is "easily found," more easily
- 6) than the Absolute Brahman of the *Upanishads*, who has "No Name and No Form."

Thus *bhakti* is the easy, direct, sure path of loving-devotion to Salvation, *moksha*, through a loving personal God.

The birth-place of *Bhakti* tradition is claimed to be South India, the banks of the river Kauvery (incidentally where I was born), from where it spread all over India through other languages and texts. The Tamil country is the birth-place of the Alvars such as Ramanuja and the Nayanmars such as Appar, whose melodious sacred *bhakti* songs have reverberated over the whole of the Tamil Country from the fifth century AD for sixteen centuries.

The second chapter establishes the backbone of my argument, namely, that *bhakti* is the priority of the *Gita*, using the *Gita*-itself as internal-evidence.^h The *Gita* has over 45 verses on *bhakti* - out of a total of 700, which is a significant 6.5 %, and each verse uses the word *bhakti* 1- 4 times. Wherever the words *jnana* and *karma* occur, they're often used in comparison with *bhakti* as "it is wise to be a *bhakta*" or "*bhakti* is wise *karma*."

As for the plot of the composition, Vyasa uses his 18 chapters ingeniously and strategically: eliminating all the rival philosophies of his time in his first six chapters, raising a cumulative bell-curve or pyramid or temple in the middle-six-chapters with the bricks of *bhakti* verses, and concluding his book, like a detective novel, with the disclosure of the mysterious hero (God), and His secret message to His beloved devotee, the *bhakta*, "I love you very much." This *Grand finale* happens in the very last chapter, in its very last verses, called the *carama-sloka* of the *Gita*.

The cap-stone of the pyramid in the middle section of the *Gita* is Chapter eleven, which presents God with great-pomp-and-fan-fare, in the gigantic-dynamic cosmic four dimensional vision, and God reveals that He 1) Krishna, is the Supreme Absolute One

God 'over and above' the 'Real of the Real' (*satyasya-satya*) Unseen-Absolute-Brahman-of-the-*Upanishads*; 2) that Theism is the New type of Religion, and 3) that *bhakti* is the New-Path to that One-God by *ananya-bhakti*, monotheism. Such is the grand entry of the monotheistic second theism of Hinduism, in contrast to the first-theism of many *Vedic* gods and numerous sacrifices.

Another significance of the *Gita*'s methodology: Vyasa uses the well-known ancient-Indian-methodology of *Purva-paksha-Siddhanta*, which first recognizes the existence of the other points of view, next disproves them, and then makes an exposition-of-its-own-theory as the Philosophy-of-Reality that transcends all-previous-points-of-view. Thus Vyasa puts the rival theories of Buddhism, Jainism, Sāṅkhya and Vedānta on their heads and turns them around before modifying them, absorbing them and transcending them. Thus the *Gita*'s Monotheism transcends Brahmanism, and its Salvation transcends Buddhist Nirvana by inclusion and assimilation.

In the third chapter of the thesis we meet two ancient giants of Hinduism, namely, Sankara and Ramanuja, and two modern giants, Tilak and Gandhi, who interpret the *Gita* in four different ways.

Sankara elevates Brahmanism chiefly against Buddhism, Jainism, Atheism (*Carvaka*) and also theism; Ramanuja, coming 300 years later, refutes Sankara proclaiming the supremacy of *bhakti* to a Personal God above reverence to Brahman. We witness Sankara's most passionate polemic of Advaita, and Ramanuja's powerfully fervent rebuttal of Sankara with his *Visishtadvaita*. Sankara logically disqualifies the *Gita* as a sacred scripture, while Ramanuja elevates the *Gita* as the most worthy sacred *Upanishad*, which unveils the secret-Knowledge that opens religion and social *dharma* to

all people of all castes and all women including *Brahmin* women and *Brahmin* men defectors by Krishna's own direct orders to set up the Law of righteousness and to destroy all evil laws (4. 3, 4, 7-8).

The two modern giants of Hinduism, Tilak and Gandhi, interpret the *Gita* as *karma-yoga* (the Doctrine of Works), for the same specific-purpose-of-regaining India's freedom by two different-innovative-ways, Activism and Non-Violent Action (*ahimsa*).

The fourth chapter of the thesis brings the critiques of four-modern-commentators of the *Gita*: Bishops Appasamy and Neill, and professors Zaehner, and Zimmer, who raise thought-provoking-questions on the *Gita* such as why Hinduism dropped the *Gita*'s insistence on monotheism, why South-Indian *bhakti* is stronger than northern *bhakti*, and reflections on Mysticism, Advaitism, and the Aryan-Hypothesis.

The final or the fifth chapter of the thesis argues that the uppermost caste misuses the 'theory' of the three *gunas*' or the three innate human Natures, purity, passion and passivity (*sattvika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa*), to exploit-and-suppress the three-lower-castes, the-casteless-untouchables and the tribal people, and that this teaching-of-castes in the *Gita* completely contradicts the-egalitarian and universal religion of *bhakti* which the *Gita*-itself-proudly inaugurates. Therefore, this-thesis-maintains that the 'verses of the *Gita* on castes' could not belong to the *Gita* but originated from the pen of a later interpolator, who is a-likely beneficiary.

The conclusion of the thesis has two parts: In the first part, on the basis of textual evidence, I argue that the *Gita*'s twin-purpose is to introduce the Personal God and the *bhakti* religion: Personal God is superior to the Absolute Brahman, and *bhakti* is superior

to *jnana* and *karma*, knowledge and works, which are, however, useful for the practice of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* passes through historical-game-changes towards its goal-of-monotheism.

Secondly, I argue that caste is not a theoretical abstract construct but a real historical multilayered social structure of races with a fixed vertical hierarchy rationalized and legitimized by orthodoxy. Since according to the *Gita*, *Krishna* comes in every *avatar* for the protection of *dharma*, to destroy unjust laws, and to establish social justice, it is only right to cast out the man made caste law of Manu and ‘delete the despicable words-“*Dalit*,” “*Harijan*” and “*Untouchable*” from the entire Indian dictionary. The word “*Dalit*” means “crushed;” “*Harijan*” means “children-of-God,” an unfortunate name that Mahatma Gandhi gave to the marginalized people to replace their former name “*pariah* untouchables,” which presently identifies them as “*Harijan-untouchables*”. Since all human beings are created by God, as children of the same Father, we’re all *Hari-jans*. Hence, no one is untouchable or *Dalit*.

Three points in closing: Firstly, without personal ill will or prejudice against the upper caste, this thesis reviews *bhakti* and caste in the context of the *Gita*’s love of God and social equality, and reflects on them as relevant to our own time.

Secondly, this thesis is not a Christian apology or defence, but rather, it brings to light a few underlying linguistic and exegetic comparisons and contrasts between the two Great-World Religions, mostly in the footnotes, hopefully without distracting the reader from the thesis proper. I treat the body of my thesis with academic and philosophical neutrality; through my Christian comments I build personal bridges to connect with the great truth values of the *Gita*, and try to evolve a fusion of the horizons of our heritages in the hope that they will throw light upon each other and enhance our understanding of

each other. As I have chosen the difficult task of reviewing the sacred text of another religion, I have assumed the risks of being criticized by the Hindus as favoring my own religion, and being judged by fellow Christians as doing the improper task of praising the good of another religion. I have endeavored to be neutral; I am humbled by my own inadequacy, but I'm enriched by the challenging experience.

Thirdly, May I make a plea to the Dean of Humanities and the Department of Philosophy of the Brock University to fund a research unit of Philosophy? Since Brock is the only University in the whole of Canada to teach Eastern and Western philosophies under one roof, it may be appropriate to name it the "*Kapila Research Centre of Philosophy*" in honor of sage Kapila (or brown man), who gave us the *Sankhya* system of philosophy that pervades many eastern philosophies, and also in honor of Dr. Ric Brown who teaches *Sankhya* with great devotion.

Thank you.

(Thilagavathi (TILLY) Chandulal)

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